

A/N: I'm BACK

A/N: I'm BACK! Okay, this is a short chapter, because its just a prologue... the other chapters will be longer. Promise. If you're coming back from Rewind (COUGHLetterPCOUGH), then HI! If not, HI! You'll like this. You don't have to read Rewind to read this, I guess, as I explain everything along the way, but it is seriously recommended, or you won't like it much... Also, I'm not going to be updating quite as fast for this one, as I only have eighteen chapters typed up. Soooo, yeah, that's it, bay-sih-cer-ly... READ IT.

Sequel to 'Rewind'

BASIC SUMMARY (if you chose not to read the first book):

The War destroyed Hogwarts. The Light lost. Everyone was killed except for Ginny Weasley, Albus Dumbledore, Sybil Trelawney and a few other un-named students. A prophecy is found, saying that Ginny needs to destroy Voldemort's heart. They misunderstand, send her back in time to 1959, when he is seventeen (yes, it's AU, move on) and to kill him. Originally they despise each other, but she avoids trying to murder him, and slowly they end up falling in love with each other. Then, just as she is starting to realise that she loves him, time bites her in the arse and drags her back to the 21st century. Nothing has changed, because by leaving the 50's, she broke his heart, and accidentally sort of turned him back into Voldemort again. She returns to 1959, tells Tom she loves him, blah blah blah. Cue the beginning of Press Play.

And no, 1959 is not a mistake.

I intended it to be that year.

Disclaimer: I don't own Ginny or Tom or Hogwarts or the Wizarding World or Dippet or Dumbledore or Flitwick or Slughorn. However, I do quite a lot of other characters, as I made them up, and the plot is entirely mine.

Press Play

PROLOGUE

Chapter One: Miss You

The train hooted its horn loudly and Ginny Peregrine cursed her wand furiously. “Stupid,” she told it. “You’re a really bad alarm-clock, you know that?”

An impatient sigh came from just behind her. “Ginevra, talking to your wand for the umpteenth time isn’t going to get you on the train any faster.”

Ginny pretended that she hadn’t heard this. Instead, she chose to talk to the train. “Don’t you dare leave!” she howled at it. “I’m warning you!”

“People are staring,” Tom hissed, following. “Just behave like a normal person until you get on the train.”

“Okay, okay,” she grumbled. She made to hurry onto the gleaming red-and-black Hogwarts Express, but Tom grabbed her hand and spun her backwards.

“Have you forgotten something?” he asked quietly, his face inches from hers. His dark eyes were oceans; oceans that could be calm or stormy or warmed by a midday sun.

“Um.” The wit that she sometimes came up with was astonishing.

One of his eyebrows lifted, and his gaze flickered down meaningfully to her trunk, the handle of which he held in long, pale fingers.

“Oops.” Ginny grinned. “Thanks.” She took the trunk from him, making a face as its weight shifted from his hand to hers.

In silent reply, the tiniest of smiles pulled at the corners of his lips – he wasn’t a very smiley person – but it passed, and he looked down. A fringe of hair so dark that it was nearly black partially hid his troubled eyes.

“What’s wrong?” With her free hand, she reached out for his.

He sighed. “I don’t know,” he muttered. “I just... I don’t know if I’ll be okay... when you’re not here to help.”

Her heart sank. Of course. “You’ll be fine,” she told him softly. “You just need to stop panicking.”

It was a problem, of course, that Tom Riddle had a satanic alter-ego that sometimes tried to kill people. It was even more of a problem when she was A) the only one who knew about it, and B) the only one who could help him – because he was a year older than her, and had therefore graduated already, he would have a year without her assistance.

“I’ll see you in the holidays, and I’ll write to you,” she promised. “Pinkie-swear.” She held up her little finger.

There was a second or two where her boyfriend stared at her little finger, and Ginny knew that he was focusing on it to regain his self-control. She kept her smallest finger in the air, waiting for him. Then he looked back to her face, his own face smooth and emotionless. “Don’t be silly,” Tom told her, pushing her finger down. “I asked you to be normal, remember?” There was a joking expression in his eyes, which he was fairly obviously inflating to hide any other emotion of distress that had previously been displayed.

She pouted, playing along. “I’ll try,” she teased.

The train bellowed its horn from behind her, making her jump.

“Ack! Gotta go.”

She turned back to him to kiss him lightly, knowing that he didn’t like publicly showing that he was capable of human emotion, and was surprised when he wrapped his arms around her and held her closely, though his eyes were flashing left and right to the other people at Kings Cross Station, Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, some of whom were watching the exchange with mild interest.

However, despite their closeness, Tom didn't kiss her.

"Stay safe," he murmured.

"I promise. Anyway, staying safe's not that hard," she replied. "If I didn't find anything dangerous last year, I doubt I'll find it this year."

"You found me."

"Thank God for that."

Now, finally, he touched his lips to hers. Then, barely a split-second later, he broke away and let go of her. "If you don't go now, you will certainly miss the train," he said coolly. "Tell Philips that I left him a suggestion of how to organise the Prefect rotas in the left drawer of the desk."

"Aww." Ginny smiled. "You do have a heart, after all."

He raised one eyebrow. "Go, Ginevra." He handed her the trunk, took hold of her shoulders and spun her to face the train; then gave her a small push towards it.

She obediently hurried towards the Hogwarts Express as the loud chug-chug-chug of it pulling away rang loud and clear in her ears. She pushed her trunk through the folding doors, and then jumped on before it started to pull away.

As it dragged its heavy body from the station, Ginny turned back to the doorway, her scarlet hair falling over her shoulder and into her face, holding onto one of the doors tightly, and watching as the tall, lean figure of Tom Riddle became smaller and smaller. The message finally sank into her brain that she probably wouldn't see that quiet young man until Christmas. She missed him painfully already.

"I love you," she whispered out of the open door, the jolting of the train speeding up swinging her precariously. Seeing sensibility and remembering her promise to stay safe, she shut and latched the door, and dragged her trunk away to find a compartment.

xxx

A/N: How lovely. Yeah, it's short, whatever. Get over it. The next one will be longer. Review if you love me! :D

Next Time:

However, her surprise turned to shock as a frighteningly familiar face appeared on an eleven-year-old girl. "Heather Tristanebury!" called Professor Dippet, reading out from his parchment list of names. A hush filled the Great Hall. The girl was easily recognisable without her name being called. Ginny leaned towards Grace, who was staring at Heather Tristanebury with an equally stunned face.

"That's Moaning Myrtle's sister, isn't it?" Ginny verified in an undertone. Grace nodded. And then Ginny noticed something even more alarming.

Everyone was staring at her.

Xxx

Chapter Two: Rumours

As it dragged its heavy body from the station, Ginny turned back to the doorway, her scarlet hair falling over her shoulder and into her face, holding onto one of the doors tightly, and watching as the tall, lean figure of Tom Riddle became smaller and smaller. The message finally sank into her brain that she wouldn't see that quiet young man until Christmas. She missed him painfully already.

xxx

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty

Don't judge on what you see

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me..."

As the Sorting Hat began its legendary song, to which Ginny knew all of the words, she fidgeted and waited for the food to arrive. She turned in her seat to beam at her two best friends at Hogwarts – in the late 1950's, at least.

Originally, Ginny had been from her own dreadful, war-struck time. Somehow, crazily, she'd wound up here, which was a very long story consisting more or less of time-travel, tears, and falling in love with the enemy. The master-plan had been to kill Tom and go home, but she'd fallen not only for him, but also for this era and the people in it, and had vowed that the only way she'd leave 1959 was at New Year's Eve when it transferred into 1960.

Grace Hartwin, tall, slim, and with brown curly hair, grinned back at her. Alden Philips – the same height as Ginny (basically, a midget), dark-haired, and of a tanned complexion – smiled slightly in response. A Head Boy badge gleamed on his chest, reminding Ginny that she had a message for him.

"Oh, Alden," she whispered, leaning across the table to him. "Tom mentioned you, before I left. He said to tell you that he left a

recommendation of how to organise the Prefect rotas for you... in one of the drawers of the desk, I think.”

Tom had been Head Boy the year before, and had, seemingly, heard that Alden had been selected as the next.

Alden nodded. “Tell him I say thanks.”

The Sorting began with Emmett Abbey, a snivelly boy who went to Gryffindor, though Ginny could see no bravery in his pasty face. It moved on quickly, and Ginny was alarmed to see a thin, pale-haired girl named Imogen Hooch with a pointed, pixie-like face also be sorted to Ravenclaw – Madam Hooch, the future flying teacher. Her surprise only continued to increase when she saw a thin brown-haired girl with glasses.

“Minerva McGonagall!”

The future Transfiguration teacher walked nervously forwards, fiddling with her collar and a curl of hair that had fallen into her eyes.

“GRYFFINDOR!”

However, her surprise turned to shock as a frighteningly familiar face appeared on an eleven-year-old girl.

“Heather Tristanebury!” called Professor Dippet, reading out from his parchment list of names.

A hush filled the Great Hall.

The girl was easily recognisable without her name being called. She was small and chubby, with her robes slightly too long, rolled up at the sleeves so that they wouldn’t cover her pudgy hands. Balanced on her snub nose were thick-rimmed glasses, but even these could barely be seen due to the heavy brown fringe across her forehead. The hairstyle was different – instead of pigtails, this Heather had a pageboy bob – but the similarity was chilling.

Ginny leaned towards Grace, who was staring at Heather Tristanebury with an equally stunned face.

“That’s Moaning Myrtle’s sister, isn’t it?” Ginny verified in an undertone.

Grace nodded.

And then Ginny noticed something even more alarming.

Everyone was staring at her.

Many people’s eyes were flickering between Ginny and Heather, Ginny and Heather, and then, after a while, to the empty seat on the teacher’s table, reserved for the Charms teacher.

She didn’t understand the connection.

“HUFFLEPUFF!”

Ginny jumped. She hadn’t realised that Heather had reached the Sorting Hat, but she applauded noisily, along with everyone else who had woken up from their stupor.

The Sorting finished some fifteen minutes later with Celine Xavier, a pretty French-looking girl who went to Ravenclaw.

“I know her,” whispered Grace excitedly, pointing to the new Ravenclaw addition. “Her sister, Fabienne, was in my brother’s year.” Jacob Hartwin had graduated two years previously, and was an architect for the Ministry. “Their whole family is very rich and very clever.”

“And very attractive,” said Alden with a vague look in his eyes.

Ginny’s mouth fell open. “Alden!” she cried, horrified. “She’s eleven!”

Alden went red. “I meant Fabienne, stupid, not Celine,” he said irritably.

“Oh, thank Merlin.” Grace looked relieved, though still jealously cross. She had dated Alden for a short period time, but had broken up messily.

The food appeared, and Ginny tucked in gleefully. Dominic, Alden’s younger brother, a second-year, appeared briefly to say hello, before returning to his friends. Ginny smiled fondly to remember the Essex accent that Dom had spoken with last year. Dinner finished fairly quickly; Ginny and Grace said goodbye to Alden as he headed off to show the new first-years to their dormitories and then to his own dormitory.

“It’s weird, having him go to the Head dorms,” said Ginny thoughtfully as they descended to the Slytherin common room.

“Why,” Grace said slyly, smirking, “who are you used to visiting up there?”

Ginny ignored this comment with flaming cheeks.

Their trunks had already been delivered to the seventh-year Slytherin girls’ dorm by the caretaker, Epaphras Weasley – no less than Ginny’s grandfather, aged approximately twenty-five. Also already in the dormitory was Claude Felina Bastet, Ramira Xau, and Avani Mohana. In the first ten minutes of Ginny arriving at the 1950’s Hogwarts, Claude had proved a spiteful toad, and Ramira and Avani her back-ups. Ramira was alright, behind Claude’s back, but was too much of a coward to speak up for herself and show that she liked Ginny.

“Home sweet home,” sighed Grace, flopping onto her bed. She reached over and unlocked her trunk without getting up, and removed her pale-blue nightgown from it.

Ginny also started to unpack. Upon the bedside table she placed a moving photograph that had been taken over the summer. It showed a tall, dark-haired young man, only the barest hint of a smile on his lips, with his arm around a beaming redhead. Tom and Ginny.

“Ooh,” said Grace, who didn’t miss a trick. She smirked again. “Nice picture.”

Ginny grinned, though her face caught fire. “I like it too.”

Flora Roosevelt, the sixth and final seventh-year Slytherin, perked up at the prospect of some gossip before the first day had even started. “Are you still going out with him?”

“Yes,” she bristled defensively, irritated by the slight emphasis on still. She tugged her own nightgown over her head, ending the conversation. She wasn’t comfortable talking about Tom when there were so many secret things that she knew and had to guard for him.

The lights turned out except for one, next to Grace, who usually fell asleep reading. They climbed into bed. Ginny turned over, closed her eyes, and prepared to sleep.

“You’re not getting away that easily!” said Grace, and flew onto Ginny’s bed, landing with a crash on top of the redhead. “I have chocolate and a hyper-drive a mile wide!”

Ginny groaned. “Oh, Merlin.”

Flora clambered over to join in the conversation, perching on the end of Ginny’s bed. “So what did you do on your summer holidays? I went to Spain with my family and my friend’s family. And we stayed in a big villa by the beach, and a Spanish boy told me that I was beautiful!” she said happily, pulling on a lock of blonde hair, smiling.

“Lucky,” said Grace. “No-one thinks I’m beautiful.”

Ginny spared a glance for her friend and noticed that Grace had changed slightly over the summer. For one thing, her hair was less an explosion of brown curls; instead, soft waves formed around her already-pretty face. The most noticeable thing, however, was by far that she seemed to have shrunk. This wasn’t true, though. It was just that she hadn’t grown, while everyone else was starting to catch up to her height.

“Aw, you are!” Flora cooed.

“Sure, you’re beautiful,” Ginny said. “You’re totally prettysville.” The fifties’ slang came naturally now. “Your hair looks really nice.”

“I let it grow out a bit,” Grace said. She was obviously uncomfortable with the level of compliments, and tried to turn the conversation away from herself. “What about Gulistan, then?” she asked of Flora.

At the mention of the Ravenclaw that she liked, Flora frowned. “I don’t know. He hasn’t ever said a word to me... apart from ‘can I borrow your textbook’ once, in Potions...” she sighed. “And this Spanish boy was a Muggle, so I can’t owl him... I’d have to send a letter to him using the post... and that costs Muggle money...”

Grace and Ginny made sympathetic noises and made feeble suggestions for a while, before asking about Grace.

“Well, Ginny stayed over for a while... then I went to France to our holiday home for the rest of the holidays,” Grace said. “I visited all these really interesting Wizarding places.”

“Oh, cool,” said Flora.

Ginny kept quiet. She was hoping that if she didn’t say anything, then she wouldn’t be noticed, and they wouldn’t ask about her summer.

“What about you, Ginny?”

Damn.

She fiddled with a strand of her hair. “Erm... I stayed two weeks with Grace in France... and then I got a part-time job in the Daily Prophet – you know, getting people coffee and stuff.” (When she had been working there, she had been surprised to see another girl working there, in her twenties, with blonde curly hair, named Marianne, who was more often than not seen with the delivery-man, John Skeeter.) “And, um... then I spent some time with Tom.”

“Ooh!” squealed Flora loudly, making Claude, Ramira and Avani look up in irritation from the other side of the room. “With Tom, eh?”

She gave the blonde a withering look. “Just... no.”

Flora looked disappointed. “So nothing happened?” she asked hopefully.

“Nope,” said Ginny brightly. Then a frown creased her eyebrows as she recalled something that had been bugging her. “Why was everyone staring at me when Heather Tristanebury was sorted?”

Grace bit her lip, and busied herself with plumping her pillow, pretending that she hadn’t heard the question. Flora began to sing. She sang a lot, as she had quite a nice voice, but this spontaneous singing Ginny could tell was just so that she didn’t have to answer.

The silence (apart from the singing) was awkward. Ginny stared at them for a while, but it was apparent that no-one was going to say anything. She was tempted to ask Claude, who was watching her reaction with narrowed eyes, but decided that she wouldn’t stop that low.

“So how about that chocolate pudding?” Grace interrupted the music, beaming at them.

Ginny was glad for talking instead of just the echoing of her thoughts in her head, but she was determined to pry the truth out from them. She sighed. “I’m just going to go to sleep.” She didn’t bother to answer what Grace had said. She stretched her mouth in a fake yawn. “Sorry, you guys. I’m so tired.”

Though she closed her eyes immediately, and buried her shoulder in the mattress comfortably, she didn’t sleep for a long time.

xxx

“So, Ginny,” said Claude, combing her halo of tight blonde curls, “now that Riddle’s not here, who do you think you’re going to get it on with next?”

The redhead glared at her. "I'm not getting it on with anyone," she said coldly.

"Oh, wait, that's true," Claude agreed snidely. "You're a Mudblood – no-one else would have you, anyway! Only Riddle would have you, because he was as close to mud as you could get, right?"

Avani laughed; Ramira gave a feeble giggle.

Ginny clenched her hands into fists, restraining herself from hitting Claude around the face. Professor Dippet, the current Headmaster, had decided for her new life that she was to be a Muggleborn – in these days, they were still quite rare, as wizards were only just getting used to the idea of mixing with Muggles. He had hoped that the rarity of her blood status would attract the attention away from any other abnormalities (i.e., being from future). It hadn't worked. She had more attention that she would have ever had before as a pureblood.

"She got Reeve, didn't she?" retorted Grace, defending her friend.

A grateful glance was passed to the brunette. 'Thanks', Ginny mouthed quickly.

Claude sniffed. She fluffed up her hair and checked her lipstick before flouncing upstairs to the common room. Avani sent a heavy-lidded glare at Ginny before following, and Ramira trailed behind.

Ginny tied the belt of her pleated skirt and then headed upstairs to breakfast with Grace and Flora.

Alden was waiting for them in the Entrance Hall, and with them, progressed to the Great Hall for breakfast.

"What classes do you have first?" he asked as they sat down.

"Um..." Grace one-handedly dug in her robes pocket, clutching to her bagel with the other hand. She fished out her timetable and flipped it

open, stuffing part of the bagel into her mouth. “ haff Tanshhfiggashun.”

“Come again?” Ginny asked.

Grace swallowed her bagel down. “Transfiguration,” she translated.

Alden and Grace began to chat happily about classes and other trivial things; meanwhile, Ginny looked around the Great Hall, seeing things that she hadn’t seen before.

Dominic, Alden’s little brother, was sitting at the Ravenclaw table and talking to the beautiful Celine Xavier, his face glowing with happiness. Jack Swithin and Claude were sitting together, showing that they’d got back together over the summer holidays. Scott Reeve, Ginny’s ex-boyfriend from last November, was sitting... alone, surprisingly, instead of surrounded by a group of adoring younger girls. Abraxas Malfoy was entertaining a group of his friends with a – from the hand actions – rude joke. Avani looked strangely lonely as she picked at a salad. Ramira was glaring at Penelope Dann, the Head Girl in Ravenclaw; clearly she had wanted the position.

Ginny realised now why Tom always sat back quietly and watched other people. So much could be learnt from about thirty seconds of observation. How much could be understood from years of it?

“-you even listening, Ginny?”

She started and turned back to her friends, who were looking at her curiously. “What, sorry, I wasn’t paying attention,” she confessed.

“I said: did you know that Professor Alcippe was only a temporary replacement? Professor Dippet’s hired a permanent teacher now,” Alden said.

“Aww.” Ginny pouted. “I liked Professor Alcippe.”

Last year, the Charms teacher, Professor Vander, had been murdered by a ‘serial killer who had fled the castle after killing’ – in

reality, it had been Tom's alter-ego. Professor Alcippe had replaced him.

"I wonder who it'll be now?" Grace said thoughtfully.

She was interrupted by a flurry of wings and paper as a thousand owls swept into the Hall. Usually Ginny didn't care for the post – she borrowed Grace's edition of the Daily Prophet instead of buying her own, and as all of her family were not only dead, but also forty-eight years into the future, she had no-one to write to. Now, though, she looked up hopefully.

Her heart swelled two sizes when an owl swooped down and landed on the rim of the bacon platter. It blinked at her, hooted softly, and then took off again, leaving an envelope behind.

Biting her lip to stop the giddy smile from breaking out on her face, Ginny opened it with her unused butter-knife. She pulled the letter out.

On the front, before she'd even unfolded the letter, was the neat cursive of Tom Riddle, saying Please move away from your annoyingly curious friends.

Ginny looked over pointedly at Grace, who was leaning towards her surreptitiously and, indeed, trying to read what she was holding. Grace coughed and moved back into her own space.

"See you in Transfiguration," Ginny told her friends, and stood. She slung her schoolbag onto her shoulder and moved from the Great Hall. She slipped through the grand doors and stood silently against the wall. Her fleeting heart made her fingers tremble as she opened it.

Ginevra,

Thank you for leaving Philips and Hartwin behind you.

She smiled. He knew her so well. The people in the Hall were leaving as the first-class bell rang. She pressed herself tight against the wall so that no-one would see her and ask to see what she was reading, or ask to accompany her to class. She doubted that anyone would

except Alden, Grace and Flora (and maybe Scott, if he had the nerve), but you could never be too sure.

Yesterday, as I expect you remembered, was my first day attempting a career in Flourish and Blott's. It wasn't as hideously terrible as I had feared. Mr. Flourish is still in charge of the shop, however, I learnt that Mr. Blott died a few years ago. All that I really have to do is put back books when inconsiderate children run amok in the shop, pulling everything out of their rightful places. It wasn't interesting, but it paid.

I trust you gave Philips the message. Also – hopefully – you obeyed my wishes and haven't put yourself in any mortal danger. How are you? I heard that Professor Alcippe was only a temporary measure; who is Vander's replacement? I don't have much else to say, I'm afraid, so I'll leave it at this: I'll see you soon and I hope to hear from you.

I lo (crossed out) Si (crossed out)

Tom

Ginny folded up the letter. She knew what the scrubbed out words meant, and it was nice to know that he cared; he just wasn't comfortable with expressing how he felt.

She sighed, and tucked the piece of parchment into the inside pocket of her robes, where it wouldn't fall out. Then she hurried up the stairs to Transfiguration, where she was two minutes late.

"What'd Tommy-boy say?" asked Grace as soon as Ginny slipped into her seat.

"He said to mind your own business," she retorted.

"You just made that up."

"Yeah, I did." Ginny stuck out her tongue. "Nosey."

Professor Dumbledore began to instruct them on Transfiguring themselves. As soon as he had said this, the class began cheering

and getting excited. However, he explained that for today, they were just going to be changing hair colour. They threw themselves into the tasks with delight.

Ginny could already do this, as she and everyone else had done this last year, but it was entertaining, and this Transfiguration lasted for much longer and was much better quality. Because of this, it was also much harder.

Half an hour later, Ginny looked in the mirror to see, with a gasp, that she had a bright purple highlight down the side of her hair. “Yes!” she shrieked. “Look at me! Wow!”

Alden turned to her. He’d Transfigured his eyes from brown to blue.

Ginny scowled. “Show off.”

She managed, over the course of the lesson, to turn her hair completely purple. She then found that she had no idea how to change it back. She sneaked out of the classroom with fabulously violet hair, but was spotted almost immediately, by Professor Dippet, no less, as she headed towards Astronomy with Grace. She went back down to Dumbledore to ask him to change it (Dippet had things to do, he said, but Ginny liked to think that he wasn’t smart enough), before continuing.

The lessons were becoming painfully hard, as now this was the NEWT year. This was the year that counted. This was the year that determined whether, once you’d graduated, you’d be a Somebody or a Nobody.

Potions was excruciating. Ginny wasn’t bad at Potions – on the contrary, she was quite good at it – but she didn’t understand what they were supposed to be doing, and when she finally understood, it was too complicated for her to follow. She was set extra homework, an addition to the fourteen-inch essay on a subject that she’d couldn’t get her head around already needed.

After that, she had a free-period, during which she sat with Alden and made him explain what the Potions lesson had been about. By the

time she understood, the free-period was over, and she'd achieved nothing except comprehending what she should have understood during the lesson.

"This is stupid," Ginny complained as she headed down to lunch with Alden, having agreed to meet Grace at the bottom of the Entrance Hall stairs. "It's the first day, and we already have so much homework. I mean, if-"

She stopped. Heather Tristanebury was walking towards her.

The eleven-year-old met her eyes, and flinched. She shrank back against the wall and waited for Ginny to move on, but the redhead didn't. She stared at the younger girl, hoping for someone to tell her why she was so afraid, until Heather's eyes filled with tears and she ran.

"What the hell is everyone's problem with me?" Ginny demanded, watching the first-year's escape.

"Be nice," Alden said. "This is, after all, the school where her sister was killed."

"Yeah, and so why is everyone taking it out on me?" she snapped.

Alden's tanned cheeks turned ruddy, and he didn't answer.

Anger bubbled inside Ginny's chest. Something was going on, and it involved her, but no-one would tell her what it was! Why would she have anything to do with Myrtle's death?

Maybe because you're in love with the person who killed her.

She froze.

It couldn't be that.

Because, for that to be the answer, that would mean that everyone knew. That everyone knew that he killed them. That he had an alter-ego. That he was evil.

And that was bad.

“Are people talking about me?” Ginny asked carefully, squashing her irritation, replacing it with her curious-face, as if she wasn’t annoyed – why, she only wanted to know what was happening!

“No,” said Alden, too quickly.

“Really?”

“No-one’s talking about you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. What’s up with you today?” Alden frowned.

She huffed. “Nothing.” Fine. So he wasn’t going to tell her. She was just going to have to find out another way.

They met Grace at the bottom of the stairs and progressed to the Great Hall. Though Ginny said hello, she wasn’t paying attention to Grace’s chatter. She was working out a plan to find out what was going on.

xxx

She had decided on the plan rather quickly. It wasn’t terribly complicated – in fact, it was simple, that she had wondered if it would work. For a week, she had been spying on Claude, Avani, and Rosalind O’Keefe, a Hufflepuff made of the same material as the first two. They were such gossips that she had been sure that one of them would be sure to let something slip.

However, nothing had been said from any of them. It was her free period now, and though she was supposed to be doing her homework, she was instead trying to find any of her three victims to eavesdrop on them.

“How hard can it be to find three loud, attention-seeking bimbos,” she muttered to herself as she searched the dungeons again.

Ginny had looked everywhere, but to no avail. Now, she was searching the underground part of Hogwarts one last time before she headed back to her dormitory to do her homework.

“Here, ditzzy, ditzzy, ditzzy,” she sang under her breath. As she reached the darker areas, she lit her wand for aid.

The candles mounted on the walls were further apart from each other in this part of the dungeons. Few people came down this far, so the need for lighting was less.

I don’t think any of them would be down here, said the rational part of Ginny’s brain, let’s go. But the irrational and more fun part said, ooh, darkness... what’s down there?

Shadows danced like the waltz of death, black silhouettes flickering and twirling – all her own, but a thousand of them, making her feel as though she was anything but alone.

“Hello,” she called into the gloom. She probably shouldn’t have had that much sugar on her cornflakes that morning. “Anyone down there? Hellooo!”

No-one answered. She didn’t really expect anyone to.

The temperature steadily declined as she went further down until she found that she was shivering. As she realised that she should probably go back up to the dormitory to do her homework now, she walked into a wall.

“Ow,” she complained, rubbing her forehead. She groaned. “Well, that was stupid.”

Trying to remember which way she’d come, Ginny made her back towards the Slytherin common room. She would visit this place later, when she had more time. It was interesting, and she wanted to explore.

Homework was calling her when she got into her dormitory, but she had only just reached for her schoolbag when she heard footsteps and the noisy voices of Claude, Ramira and Avani chatting.

Perfect opportunity!

She leapt to her feet and raced across the room, slipping into her wardrobe and closing the door behind her, leaving the door only the tiniest crack open so that she could hear what was being said, and also so that she could get out later.

“Urgh, I hate Divination,” said Ramira. “It doesn’t teach you anything.”

“It’s fantastic!” said Claude, and though Ginny couldn’t see her, she could tell from that tone that her eyes would be gleaming in that unpleasant way of hers. “If you can get it right, you can see the future! Imagine knowing all the gossip before it happens!”

That was so typical of Claude. Ginny rolled her eyes.

“We don’t need any more rumours,” Ramira said quietly. “We have enough already.”

Aha!

“You can never have too many rumours,” Avani retorted, and for a second Ginny thought that they were going to move away from this subject and talk about something else, but then Avani continued. “Though we have got our hands pretty full right now. I mean, there are so many theories that it’s impossible to work out who’s right!”

“You know what my theory is?” Claude said thoughtfully, chewing loudly on a piece of gum.

“What?” Avani and Ramira leaned closer, eager as ever for their leader’s words.

“It’s her!” Claude shrieked with laughter, and the other two joined in.

“Well, duh, it’s her... but why? That’s what I want to know. I mean, it’s not even like it’s a jealous rage of killing purebloods or anything. They’re all scum like she is.”

Fury rose inside Ginny, magma in a volcano, and she fought it down before she erupted. She didn’t want to leap out and strangle them all. Her temper could be lit like flint and steel.

“Vander – half-blood. Riddle – half-blood. Myrtle – Mudblood...”

“Well...” Claude drew out the word for suspense. “I think that maybe there’s something wrong with her. You know, up here.” She tapped her skull. “Because I can’t see any other reason. Honestly.”

“Maybe she was under the Imperius.”

“Puh-lease!”

“Ramira, so far she’s killed two people, tried to kill a third – who knows who’s next?”

“She sleeps in our room!” wailed Avani.

“Let’s go through it one more time,” said Claude. “We can work it out if we don’t miss any details. ‘Kay?”

“Coolsville.”

“Right. So, the year before she shows up, Myrtle – a Mudblood – is killed. In a girls’ bathroom. Which means it has to be a girl, so it could be her. She turns up for no reason and gets sorted into Slytherin, even though she’s a Mudblood...”

“You would have to seriously evil to get into Slytherin if you’re mud,” Avani chimed in helpfully. “So far, it fits.”

“Last year, Vander – a half-blood – is killed. She ‘finds’ them. How did she know where they were? A first-year is a witness, but she’s too traumatised by watching a murder to say anything-”

"Maybe her memory was modified afterwards," suggested Ramira. Ginny scowled. She had, previously, thought that Ramira was on her side.

"-yeah, that too. Riddle – a half-blood – is at the scene of the crime, dying, and set up with a knife. I think that she tried to kill both of them, and tried to make it look like it was Riddle, but hoped that he wouldn't survive. That's why the area around him was cursed."

"But she went out with Riddle!" Avani said.

"She still is going out with him."

"Precisely! Because now she looks even more innocent! She wouldn't date someone that she wanted to kill, would she? Or that's what she wants you to think. Now that he's out of school, she'll probably kill him. He has no friends. No-one would notice that he was missing... until he turned up in a ditch... in pieces!"

Claude snarled the last few words, lighting her wand beneath her chin to cast shadows and create a dramatic effect. Ramira and Avani laughed nervously; the thought of the ex-Head Boy being dismembered was something they clearly didn't find as gut-wrenchingly funny as Claude did.

"But... Claude, she wasn't here last year, when Myrtle was killed," Ramira pointed out.

"But Riddle was." Claude's voice was smug. Ginny could imagine the disgusting smirk on her pretty lips. "Last year, I went to the library to meet Jack for some... alone-time, shall we say... and on my way back, down to breakfast, guess what I saw? Riddle, shaking and twitching... and Peregrine holding him." She leaned closer, lowering her voice so that Ginny had to strain to hear her next words: "he was possessed."

Ginny's blood ran cold. Claude had seen Tom's attack, and had recognised what it was... but had got the wrong idea. She closed her eyes and took deep breaths to calm herself down. She closed her vicious temper into a little box and locked it tight.

So that was why everyone had been staring at her. They thought that she was the murderer. That was why Heather Tristanebury had been so terrified of her. She thought that because she was a Muggle-born, and related to Myrtle, then Ginny would kill her, too.

Kill her too? I haven't killed anyone!

Then they moved on to talk about cute guys in the school, which Ginny had to endure the torture of for about twenty minutes before they decided to head up to dinner.

She made sure that they had definitely gone before getting out of the wardrobe. Her legs were cramped, and her foot had gone to sleep, so she was uncomfortable, and had to sit on the edge of her bed for a while, waiting for the feeling to come back, before she could follow them to the Great Hall.

Stupid people thought they could just say things like this.

There was going to be hell to pay.

xxx

A/N: -gasp- I haven't said this yet, so I'm going to say it now. Four things. Firstly: there's obviously going to be limited Tom in here, as he's not at school anymore, but I fit him in wherever I can, and most things are related to him. Secondly: this fic is going to be nice and angsty. I've done a Stephanie Meyer – the first story is romantic and the second is all depressing. Don't you think that love stories are more interesting that way? Thirdly: So that the chapters are long enough for your satisfaction, I squish several chapters into one big one. Because of this, things happen more quickly, and also the whole fic is probably going to be shorter than Rewind. Fourthly: I have an obsession with Cute Is What We Aim For now. I LOVE 'em. Just wanted to say.

Next Time:

Ginny slammed her schoolbag down onto the table in front of Grace and Alden. "Do you think that I'm a murderer?" she snapped.

They both looked up in alarm. Alden looked as though he was going to say something – perhaps deny it. Ginny doubted that he would deny, but even if he did, Grace glanced behind her anxiously, as though afraid that someone would overhear, and she gave them both away.

"Don't worry about other people," Ginny said icily. "They all think I'm a psychopath too, so you don't need to trouble yourself."

Xxx

Chapter Three: How Young

So that was why everyone had been staring at her. They thought that she was the murderer. That was why Heather Tristanebury had been so terrified of her. She thought that because she was a Muggle-born, and related to Myrtle, then Ginny would kill her, too.

She made sure that they had definitely gone before getting out of the wardrobe. Her legs were cramped, and her foot had gone to sleep, so she was uncomfortable, and had to sit on the edge of her bed for a while, waiting for the feeling to come back, before she could follow them to the Great Hall. Stupid people thought they could just say things like this. There was going to be hell to pay.

xxx

Ginny slammed her schoolbag down onto the table in front of Grace and Alden. "Do you think that I'm a murderer?" she snapped.

They both looked up in alarm. Alden looked as though he was going to say something – perhaps deny it. Ginny doubted that he would deny, but even if he did, Grace glanced behind her anxiously, as though afraid that someone would overhear, and she gave them both away.

"Don't worry about other people," Ginny said icily. "They all think I'm a psychopath too, so you don't need to trouble yourself." It wasn't even a problem anyway, because they were early, and they were in Herbology, where the tables were spaced far enough apart so that the few people already there couldn't hear what they were saying.

She pulled her books out of her bag and threw them down onto the table. Her ink-pot smashed and ink sprayed everywhere, but she didn't care. She swept her bag off the desk and sat down heavily, staring at her two best friends through narrowed eyes.

"So what's your theory as to why I'm killing people?" she demanded. "Do you think that I'm just insane, like the rest of them think? Or do you have your own special ideas?"

Grace was very pale, her blue eyes wide. "Ginny, I don't-"

"Sit down." Alden folded his arms across his chest and leant his elbows on the table.

"No."

"Ginny, sit."

Huffing at being ordered about, Ginny dumped herself on the stool and glared at both of them.

"These rumours that are going around are-"

"Total bollocks," Grace cut in.

"Thank you, Grace." He gave her a sharp look. "Yes, a lot of people believe them, but if they do, then they're not people you would want to be friends with anyway, are they? I don't believe it; Grace doesn't believe it."

Ginny opened her mouth to say-

"We didn't tell you because we thought that you'd be really upset. We figured that it would all die down before you found out," Alden explained.

"I told you that it wouldn't work." Grace looked smug, grinning. "She's too stubborn for that."

"True." Ginny repaired her ink-pot and cleaned up the ink with her wand. "Sorry that I was mad with you."

One of the things that she loved about those two was that they never held grudges. They accepted her apology, and got through their Herbology work peacefully.

In the evening, she realised with some guilt that, in the business of following Claude, Avani and Rosalind, and also with all of her NEWT homework, she'd never replied to Tom's letter.

She pushed aside her Astronomy essay, grabbed a new piece of parchment, and began to scribe her response.

Tom, she wrote. 'Dear Tom' sounded stupid to her, and 'to Tom' too unfamiliar. As a joke, she considered writing, 'my darling Tom', but decided against it.

Sorry that this is so late. I totally forgot. I've got so much work to do. I feel so thick; I'm falling behind in pretty much everything. And it's only the first week! Well, at least Flourish and Blott's pays. I'm also bored, but I don't get anything from this boredom, except for a couple of NEWTs to flash at the careers advisors at the end of the year. Just wait 'till the novelty of 'your first job' wears out. Then you'll be complaining.

I'm doing alright. Claude's being evil again, but that's no surprise. Scott Reeve's already had two girlfriends in this first week. Both of them are over-exaggerating their heartbreak. They've taken to crying loudly for attention lately. I suppose it's a change for Scott, from what I did. Hitting him in the face, I mean. Grace and Alden are doing great as well, they put all of that falling-in-love-then-dating-then-breaking-up-badly thing behind them. Yeah, I gave him the message, he's really grateful. He might send you his own letter, actually.

She paused, looking over her words. Unconsciously, her brain had prepared the next couple of sentences, but now, she wasn't sure that she actually wanted to write that. These rumours would get him really upset.

Well. Not upset.

But he'd be really moody and sort of angsty, because he'd be worried that people would find out his deep, dark secrets.

A sigh pulled from her lips. She finally understood why Grace and Alden hadn't told her. It was all so complicated.

Well, I don't have much else to say. Hope to hear from you soon! Sorry, again, that this has been delayed.

Love, Ginny xxx

She folded the parchment in half, put her quill away, and headed up towards the Owlery to send it off.

Now that Ginny knew the rumours, she noticed people everywhere who believed them. She understood why the younger students flinched, why the older ones looked at her with suspicion glowing in their eyes. Once she paid attention, she saw that there were very few people who didn't believe them.

The Owlery, she decided, was a good place to be. The owls that lined the wooden beams, sleeping, hooting softly, or watching her with round eyes, didn't care whether she was a murderer or not, whether she was from the future or not. They were happy with who she was.

She chose a sturdy-looking barn owl who looked as though he could withstand the long journey into London. "To Tom Riddle, please. In London, Diagon Alley. The Leaky Cauldron."

With a bob of its head, the owl showed that it had understood. It extended a leg so that Ginny could attach the letter to it, and then swooped away through the window.

Just as Ginny was watching it disappear against the horizon, she heard the door open behind her.

She turned and saw Scott coming, holding a letter. He started when he saw her.

"Oh. Hi." He looked down, as though he had been trying to avoid her, but was too much of a man to run back through the door and down the stairs.

"Hey," she replied. She was normally less-than-friendly to him, but she was annoyed by his behaviour. It wasn't to say that she didn't enjoy the lack of him hitting on her, but the reason why irritated her.

Scott didn't reply. He made a big show of looking for an owl.

“So what’re you posting?” Ginny asked, nodding at the letter.

“A letter.” State the obvious, why don’t you? Her expression must have displayed her thoughts, as he smiled slightly and said, “Well, duh, it’s a letter... It’s for my girlfriend.”

“That’s nice.” She tried not to roll her eyes, and instead went in for the big question. “Scott, do you actually believe what everyone’s saying about me?”

He didn’t answer, technically. He bit his lip and gave a small, “oh”, like he had expected that this was coming, but had hoped that he’d be proved wrong.

“I’m not a psychopath!”

“You broke my nose after I broke up with you.”

“Yeah, but I broke your nose because you broke up with me. Because you only broke up with me after you cheated on me.”

Scott went red. “I’m so sorry about that, Ginny.” He stuck his hands in his pockets. “I didn’t really think about it. I was just... sort of captivated. By your beauty and intelligence. By... by you. I wasn’t ready for you, though. I went into it too fast. I didn’t think. But...” Scott gave Ginny a smouldering look from under his eyelashes. “I think I’m ready now.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“One more chance?”

“I thought that you were posting a letter... to your girlfriend,” she said pointedly, settling her hands on her hips.

“It’s a break-up letter,” he replied proudly.

“You’re nice.”

“It didn’t work. She’s sort of a freak.”

“Is that what you told people after you and me called it quits?”

“No! Of course not. I really like you, cat - Ginny,” he amended hastily, seeing the redhead’s eyes narrow at the nickname she hated. “Please? What do you say?”

She sighed, putting on her most sympathetic face. “Scott... dear, dear Scott... while there is nothing that I would rather do than date an arrogant asshole for the second time, frankly, I’d rather do more interesting things... like watching chicken defrost. Plus, you didn’t do your research, did you? I’m still with Tom.”

An incredulous look came over his face. “Still?”

“Yup.”

“But – but he’s not at school anymore!”

“Funnily enough, I was aware of that.”

“And you are at school!”

“No,” she retorted sarcastically, “really?” She gasped, clapping her hands to her cheeks. “Well, I’ll be damned if this isn’t the mental asylum! Because after all, that is the location I presume when I see you.”

Scott scowled. “Very funny, Ginny.” He gave his letter to an owl, and shooed it out of the window. Still glaring, he muttered, “See you around,” and stomped off.

So Scott Reeve didn’t believe the rumours. He still liked her... She wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. Ginny groaned. Oh Merlin. He still liked her!

xxx

Every year, in Slytherin, Ginny found, they re-did the Quidditch trials, so that in case there was brand new talent that hadn't been there before, then the less talented players of last years could be chucked if necessary.

She stood in the warm September breeze, holding her favourite of the school brooms in hand. She had thought last year of buying her own broomstick, but had decided that they were much too expensive, and that there wasn't really any point to wasting all that money, as she was only going to be at Hogwarts another year, and she doubted that after that she'd pursue a career in Quidditch.

It was a pleasant enough temperature that she could wear a simple T-shirt with her Quidditch leggings. The full uniform wasn't required for try-outs, as the people who wouldn't get on would then have to buy the kit for no reason. She was pleased by the fact that T-shirts were coming into style about now, because blouses could be uncomfortable.

First to try out were the Beaters. Only one needed to try out, as the other Beater was Jack Swithin, Claude's boyfriend, and also the Quidditch Captain. Last year, the other Beater had been William Nomes, who won the place again, hitting the Bludgers far faster, far harder and far more accurately than everyone else by miles, despite only being fourteen.

Next was the Seeker. Vegrandis Palmer, a sixth-year, remained there as he had last year. Ginny had thought that he was nice enough, but then had accidentally interrupted him to hug Tom when he was asking her out, and he'd turned evil after that.

For the Keeper, last year it had been Celem Magnus, a thoroughly pureblood boy who hated his life. Now, however, he'd left the school, so he needed to be replaced.

Ginny was pleased to see a girl try out for Keeper, a third-year called Delilah Manson; slightly disappointed, though, when she turned out to be awful. At least her presence seemed to be encouraging other girls to join the Quidditch teams, which made her happy.

Instead, the Keeper chosen was another sixth-year, called Bernard Terby. He was handsome and sophisticated, and he knew it. Between stopping the others from scoring, he was flashing dazzling smiles and tossing his sleek brown fringe out of his eyes. Even Ginny had to reluctantly admit that he was pretty hot. Then she scolded herself for being such a dippy fan-girl, and tried to concentrate.

Then Chasers.

Abraxas Malfoy, Slytherin's star Chaser, had graduated, and needed a replacement.

There were eleven to try out. Ginny was sixth.

First. Crashed the broom before he even got to the goalposts.

Second. Shot three goals but took a long time getting off the ground.

Third. Rupert Flax, one of the Chasers from last year. Scored eight goals. Ginny smiled at this. He managed exactly the same amount of points as he did in last year's try-outs. Then, in the dwindling seconds of his attempt, when no-one expected him to do any better, he dropped the Quaffle, dived, caught it, and hurled it, ricocheting it off the side of the goal-hoop and scoring. Nine goals.

Fourth. A fifth-year who, ironically, scored five goals.

Fifth. The one before Ginny. He got eight. Just before Flax.

Sixth.

Time to shine.

Ginny mounted the broomstick and took off. It felt weird, flying again, after the summer, when she hadn't done any flying at all. She gave herself a few seconds to get used to it again, before signalling to Jack Swinton that she was ready to go.

Then she was swerving and swooping and throwing and catching and diving and dropping and missing and grabbing and flying and flinging and the points ticked up slowly...

One – two – miss – drop – three – drop – she was doing badly today – she hurried up – four – five- six – miss – a bad throw from Rupert Flax, which she caught in the tips of her fingers, reaching out as far as she could, so that she nearly fell off and plummeted to the sand – seven – eight – drop – nine – bingo, she was on the team now for sure – ten – miss – eleven –

She had time to squeeze in a twelfth shot, which just made it through the hoop, before the whistle was blown, and she returned to the ground beaming.

Number seven to try out stunned her.

He was tiny, he was dark-haired, he was shy... and he was amazing.

Twelve-year-old Dominic Philips scored seventeen goals in the two minutes provided.

“Whoa,” Ginny gasped as he flew down again. “High-five! Dude, that was brilliant!”

“Do you think Alden will be pleased?” Dominic asked anxiously after he’d slapped Ginny’s palm, five years older, but roughly the same size.

“Dom, you even beat Abraxas Malfoy’s score from last year! I think you’ve made some sort of record here!” she told him, grinning, happy for him.

Roars of approval sounded from the audience as, a couple of minutes later, the names were announced for the Quidditch team: “Jack Swithin, William Nomes, Vegrandis Palmer, Rupert Flax, Ginevra Peregrine and Dominic Philips”.

Ginny and Dominic turned to see a screaming Grace and also a cheering Alden, which was nice to see, as he was quiet and usually preferred to clap timidly from the sidelines.

“Well done, kid,” said Ginny brightly, hitting him on the back. “Every second- and first-year girl will fancy you now.”

He flushed pink and stuttered, “W-what?” and Ginny wondered with a smile if he was thinking about the pretty French Celine Xavier.

Then Alden caught up to give his little brother a massive hug (Grace joined in, just because she liked hugs), and Ginny didn’t get a chance to say anymore.

Don’t fall in love so young, she simply told him in her head. She knew that he couldn’t hear her, but while she smiled big and congratulated him, she warned him repeatedly. It never works out.

Suddenly, panic struck her.

Don’t fall in love so young. It never works out.

How young was young?

xxx

Saturdays and Sundays were bliss. No classes, no teachers... just time where she could sit back, finish her homework, and relax. Admittedly, doing NEWT-standard homework was anything but relaxing, but it had to be done.

Ginny stabbed a full-stop on her essay for the final sentence, thus finishing her Muggle Studies homework. She briefly considered scrawling underneath her work the words ‘hah! I FINISHED!’ but restrained herself quickly, and put the roll of parchment back into her bag.

She sat back for a moment or two, wondering what she should do now, before deciding that she would go down to the very end of the dungeons again and explore.

Tucking her wand into the waistband of her time-period-appropriate swing-skirt, she headed off out of the Slytherin common room and made her way down the cold steps to where she'd begun her pointless search for Claude and Avani.

It was raining outside – typical Scottish weather – and the dampness was seeping through the stone walls and ceiling, gathering as condensation around the flickering torches mounted on the walls, forming puddles underfoot. Ginny took note of this and was careful not to slip and fall over spectacularly thus throwing herself down a flight of very painful-looking stairs. She'd promised Tom to stay safe, and breaking every bone in her body probably didn't register as such in his book.

Or in mine, she thought as she picked her way down the steps.

As the ground beneath her was beginning to level out, she heard voices and footsteps.

Panic threaded its way into her head. What if she wasn't actually allowed down here?

She fled into the shadows and pressed herself tight against the wall. Hopefully, whoever it was would walk straight past and not notice her at all. She prayed fervently that it wasn't Slughorn – he hated her, and would like nothing better than this opportunity to yell his head off at her and blame her for things.

Don't notice me. Don't notice me. I'm invisible. You can't see me.

It wasn't a teacher at all. It was a group of Gryffindors from her year.

The dark, good-looking Faisal Alfonso. The burly Percival Goudding, more muscles than brains. Luke Webber, thought that he was brilliant but really wasn't. And one girl, devastatingly beautiful Charlotte Tanner.

For one moment of relief, Ginny thought that they were just going to walk straight past and not acknowledge that she was there. She should have known better.

“What’s that?” Goulding grunted, gesturing into the shadows where she was standing.

Ginny stopped breathing. She pressed herself into the wall so much that she could feel the cracks in the stone under her back.

“Lumos.”

Light flashed in her eyes, blinding her after the darkness of the shadows, and she protectively threw her hands up in front of her face, on instinct.

“Peregrine.” Charlotte Tanner’s golden eyes narrowed. “What are you doing, lurking in the dungeons?”

“I’m a Slytherin; these dungeons are my territory. I can lurk wherever I damn please,” Ginny snapped, glaring at the source of the light, despite the throbbing headache it was giving her.

“Ladies!” Alfonso cut in. “If you can’t play nicely, then you can’t play at all.” He set a hand on Tanner’s stomach and pulled her back towards him. “Behave,” he whispered to her, smirking. The light’s brightness faded; it was her wand that was shining.

“Get a room, you two,” Ginny growled, taking her wand from her waistband. “Now let me out.”

“What were you doing in the shadows, eh?” he continued, oblivious to her snarl. “Let me guess. Waiting for someone to come past? Were you planning to ambush us, then? Slam us to the ground and rip our throats out?” A daunting smile on his dark lips, he trailed the tip of his wand along her own throat, resting it at the bottom of her jaw. “Just like you did with Vander?”

She drew in a breath to fire out the worst of her Bat-Bogey Hexes at him, but just as she got the words from her voicebox, her wand flipped out of her hand.

Almost nonchalantly, boredly, Alfonso caught it.

“Non-verbal spells,” he sneered. “You should try them sometime.”

Damnit! Why was she being so pathetic? She hadn’t lived through a War to be overcome by a group of four measly Gryffindors, had she?

His followers chuckled, amused by her helplessness.

Ginny’s hands tightened into fists, ready to swing at any moment.

“See, I don’t actually believe that you’re a murderer,” said Alfonso, staring down at her, his expression careful, dangerous. “But... everyone else does! Imagine the glory we could get, if we brought down the school’s resident terrorist.”

I’m not a bloody terrorist!

“Malfoy did this last year,” Ginny said fiercely. “You saw what happened to him, didn’t you? Ended up with a broken nose. You want to look that way for your precious girlfriends, then fair enough!”

Tanner snarled like an angry cat at the mention of ‘precious girlfriends’, honey-blond hair swinging around her high cheekbones.

Alfonso pointed two wands in her face – his and hers.

“But, Peregrine, if you remember, you only had the chance to break his nose because your darling Riddle swept in to save you...” he tilted his head mockingly. “Where’s Riddle now?”

He was right, and they all knew it.

Her heartbeat was pounding in her ears until she could barely hear what they were saying. Calm down, she told herself. Calm down,

calm down. Think of a plan. Take out Alfonso first – he's strong, and he's also the smartest. Get your wand back, jinx –

“Flipendo!”

She slammed backwards, her head snapping back and cracking against the stone wall. Her knees gave out, and she nearly collapsed, but clung to the cobbles behind her for support until she was strong enough.

Once she'd recovered some of her energy, Ginny flung her fist forwards and up. It connected with the corner of Alfonso's jaw with a satisfying crunch, though that may just have been her hand, because pain fired through her knuckles and made its way up her shoulder, paralyzing her lower arm.

“Merlin!”

Seeing the pain in his expression, and the weird angle that his jawbone was at, adrenaline flooded through her.

She kicked and punched and clawed and threw herself forwards –

And somehow managed to find herself pinned to the floor, writhing and hissing, Goulding securing one arm, Webber the other, while Tanner towered over her. Alfonso was recovering from the shock of having a girl take a swing at him. This was, after all, the fifties' – say goodbye to well-behaved young ladies.

Tanner rested one foot on Ginny's stomach.

Ginny noted the high-heels, and groaned a swear-word. Then pain punctured her stomach and the darkness closed in.

xxx

A/N: Ooh, bitchy Gryffindors. Hehe. I'm lovin' my new interpretation of Gryfs. I kind of made it like now the Gryffindors are evil, and the Slytherins are good, I know, it sucks, but actually it's not like that. The Slytherins are decent to their friends, but turn really nasty on people

they don't like (e.g. Ginny freaks out and hits people all the time, remember?), and the Gryffindors just hate Snakies in general. Just clearing that up. Please review!

Next Time:

Realisation whirled through her as she recalled something. Alfonso had been holding her wand. She snapped her gaze around so fast that her head swam. Where was it?

Frantically, she scrambled on her hands and knees, feeling in the shadows for the familiar piece of wood that was vital to her education and existence.

xxx

For some weird reason that REALLY pisses me off, I can't make the title of Chapter One change. AAARGRRHHHHHH!

Chapter Four: Know Too Much

So Scott Reeve didn't believe the rumours. He still liked her... She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. Ginny groaned. Oh Merlin. He still liked her!

Roars of approval sounded from the audience as the names were announced for the Quidditch team: "Jack Swithin, William Nomes, Vegrandis Palmer, Rupert Flax, Ginevra Peregrine and Dominic Philips".

Suddenly, panic struck her. Don't fall in love so young. It never works out. How young was young?

"See, I don't actually believe that you're a murderer," said Alfonso, staring down at her, his expression careful, dangerous. "But... everyone else does! Imagine the glory we could get, if we brought down the school's resident terrorist." Tanner rested one foot on Ginny's stomach. Ginny noted the high-heels, and groaned a swear-word. Then pain punctured her stomach and the darkness closed in.

xxx

When she woke up, it was dark.

She wondered if she'd been asleep so long that night had fallen, but then remembered that she was in the dungeons, and it would be dark anyway.

Her head throbbed. Ginny lifted up a hand to her head and could feel her blood pulsing through. There was a clump of dried blood in her hair where she'd hit her head against the wall. It hurt when she touched it, and she reminded herself not to again. Her stomach felt as though it had been repeatedly stabbed, which – remembering Tanner's high-heels – it probably had.

I'm pathetic, she decided. I can fight off Death Eaters, but I can't fight off seventeen-year-old students.

Realisation whirled through her as she recalled something.

Alfonso had been holding her wand.

She snapped her gaze around so fast that her head swam. Where was it? Frantically, she scrambled on her hands and knees, feeling in the shadows for the familiar piece of wood that was vital to her education and existence.

“Accio wand!” she said loudly; her voice croaked and the words twisted. Nothing happened. She tried again. No wand came flying towards her reassuringly.

Crap! They’d stolen her wand!

“I am useless,” she said aloud to herself. “I got mugged... by Gryffindors.” She knew that she had used to be one, but still – the word Gryffindor seemed so wrong now.

Feeling as though she could pass out at any moment, Ginny staggered back up to the Slytherin common room.

Grace and Alden were waiting there for her.

“Ginny!” Grace cried when the redhead stumbled through the doorway. “Where have you been? What’s wrong?”

“Gryffindors,” was all she would say.

She sank into one of the squashy armchairs, groaning as the movement hurt her head, back and arm.

“What have you done to your hand?” Alden said incredulously.

Ginny lifted the hand in question. It was purple, swollen, and definitely not the shape it was supposed to be. At least two of her knuckles were in the wrong place. “Wow,” she said. “That must have been a hell of a punch.”

Grace whistled appreciatively. “Bloody hell.”

"I think it's broken," said Ginny.

"Really?" Alden's sarcasm made her laugh. Her laughter hurt, and the 'ha-ha's turned into 'ow's.

"So what happened?"

Ginny sighed, and repeated the experience for them as quickly as possible. "...and then I woke up, and my wand was gone. Those idiots have got it, probably with a spell so that I can't Summon it."

Once she'd finished, Grace looked furious. "I'll kill 'em!"

"Thanks, Grace, but I'll be fine," Ginny gave her a smirk.

"Ohh." Grace shuddered. "I'd hate to be them."

After a year, most people had learnt that an angry Ginny was not someone you wanted against you. She could unleash hell with no warning. Damnit, she sometimes scared Satan.

"Anyway, what time is it?" Ginny asked, changing the subject. "Is there still time to go to Madam Royce to get my hand fixed?"

Alden glanced at his pocket-watch. "Probably not." He grimaced. "You've been out for a while. It's nine o'clock."

Her stomach lurched.

"I finished my homework at five!" she gasped. "I – my – dinner!"

Grace looked guilty. "Sorry. I would have saved you some, but I assumed you'd just got in before us and already left. I thought you'd already eaten."

Ginny huffed. "I'm just going to have a shower, and then go to bed early..." She stared at her swollen hand. "I don't want to damage myself any further, though..."

She glanced up at them.

"I have a suggestion." Grace grimaced. "I don't think that you're going to like it, though."

"Just tell me."

"Well. It involves you biting onto something as hard as possible to distract yourself..." Grace trailed off meaningfully.

Five minutes later found Ginny kneeling on the floor, a leather belt clamped between her teeth, the fingers on her healthy hand curled into the material of the sofa.

"Okay, on three, alright?"

Nod.

"You ready?"

Nod.

"One... two..." SNAP.

Ginny screamed.

xxx

"Screw the Gryffindors, I'm going to kill you," muttered Ginny darkly as she, Alden and Grace mounted the steps to the Hospital Wing.

"I love you, too," said Grace brightly.

"You said you were going to do it on three!"

"It would have hurt more if Grace did it on three, because you would have been expecting the pain, and your brain would naturally have given an illusion of it being more painful than it actually was," Alden told them.

The two girls stared at him.

“Where the hell did you learn that?”

“Same place as I learnt that during your life, you swallow an average of eight spiders.”

“Ew.”

“You have way too much free time.”

Madam Royce was treating a snivelling first-year with skinned knees. She siphoned the blood away with her wand, and then healed it with the most basic of spells – even Ginny could have done it. Then she turned her attention to the three seventh-years in the doorway.

“How can I help you?” she asked as she bustled over.

Ginny wordlessly extended her purple hand for the matron to see.

“Oh, dear. How did this happen?” Madam Royce said, looking amazed. She peered at it through her half-moon glasses. “That’s quite a break, young lady.”

“I punched someone,” she shrugged.

Madam Royce frowned disapprovingly. “Would that be Mr. Alfonso with the shattered jaw?” she tutted. “In the bed to the left, near the end.” As she inspected Ginny’s hand, she added, “What happened? The bones have been put back together very nicely.”

Grace nodded smugly at Ginny; the redhead glowered.

Tutting again, Madam Royce made Ginny drink a potion and then cast a spell on her hand; she put a cast on her knuckles so that they would set in the right place while the spell healed them over the next twenty-four hours, and then dismissed them.

“Hang on,” said Ginny under her breath as the matron bustled back to a sickly-looking third-year. “I’m going to have a chat with my dear friend Alfonso.”

She made her way stealthily past Madam Royce's turned back, and then stopped in front of a sleeping Faisal Alfonso. His jaw was in a cast, much like the one that her hand was in, and the cast was strapped to his head. It looked, to Ginny, as though she'd knocked it clean off. She probably hadn't, but imagining that she had made her happy.

"Alfonso..." she whispered, ducking close to his bed. "Where's my wand, you nasty little Gryffindor turd?"

He didn't wake up.

"Right." She glanced around to check that Madam Royce wasn't watching, before closing her eyes, and attempting Leglimency.

'Attempting' being the operative word.

After a few seconds of straining her brain cells to try and get into his head, she gave up with a noisy huff of annoyance. Why was it that the great and mighty Harry Potter could do these sort of things, but she couldn't? Maybe he couldn't, actually. That was just what he boasted to her. He was probably as defenceless as she was.

"Where is it?" she hissed angrily at him.

No reaction.

There was no point. He wasn't going to wake up anytime soon, and even if he did, he wasn't going to tell her, was he?

She sighed. It was then that she noticed the bundle of the robes that he'd been wearing when he broke his jaw... and the slim piece of wood hidden inside it that was not his own. With a triumphant aha to mark her success, she took her wand and stowed it inside her own robes.

"Idiot, thinking you could take me," she told him, and walked proudly back to where Alden and Grace were waiting.

That morning, at breakfast, which they headed off to next, was when Tom's reply came by owl. It reminded her of her meeting with Scott in the Owlery, and she remembered what he'd told her there.

Her hazel eyes danced across the Ravenclaw table, and then suddenly, there were brown eyes looking across the Slytherin table – their gazes collided. To Ginny's immense surprise, Scott looked back at her evenly. Not smiling cheekily, not going red, not winking, not being saucy in general. He just watched her, until a heat came up in her cheeks, and she was forced to look away.

She instead turned her gaze back to the letter in her hands.

"I'll see you in Charms," said Alden, presuming – correctly – that she'd leave the Hall again to read it.

"Kay, see you guys." Ginny slung her school-bag over her shoulders, smoothed her school skirt as she stood, and then progressed to the Entrance Hall, where, same as last time, she stood close to the wall to open the envelope.

Her bandaged knuckles made slitting the top of the envelope difficult, but she succeeded eventually, and the letter fell out into her fingers.

Ginevra,

I don't mind the lateness. I was a little anxious-

She winced. She could translate that. It meant that he had been absolutely frantic and paranoid and not able to concentrate on anything.

-but I suppose I'll get used to it. You will have a lot of work to do. It's just unusual, not having you around. It's so peaceful now – don't worry, I'm not serious, though it is strangely quiet. Yes, the novelty in Flourish and Blott's has worn off, but I console myself with the thought that this is only my first occupation – the first, hopefully, of many more. I should move on once I've found something more adequate for my interests.

Bastet always annoyed me, even when she was only eleven. Let me know if Reeve (or anyone else, for that matter) dares to upset you again. There'll be hell to pay for them.

She thought, with a cringe, of the encounters she'd had so far – with the Gryffindors, in the dungeons, and with Scott, in the Owlery. Perhaps it was best that she didn't let him know. There was no point in getting him all het up about nothing much. She didn't like keeping so much from him, though, and he'd been even more upset when he found out.

If he found out, she corrected herself.

I remembered that it's coming up towards the Quidditch season soon. Are you trying out for the team? Though, by the time this gets to you, you'll probably already have tried out and won a place. Thank you for passing my message along, though I knew you would. Is nothing else happening at Hogwarts? It seems rather quiet. Perhaps that's just me; always used to attacks and massacres when I was there.

Anyway, there's no point in me being unnecessarily macabre. Don't mind me. I am in a slightly morbid mood, as a few days ago, Madam Malkin's daughter was killed a few shops away from where I was at the time. My luck is contagious. I hope to hear from you soon; I hope that my letter didn't get you too depressed with life.

Tom

Ginny sighed. It was so wonderful, hearing from him. His formal, articulate way of speaking – and writing – was so different from everyone else. It was a breath of fresh air, seeing the perfectly-formed handwriting that she would recognise anywhere. She had been too busy to miss him so far, but she did miss him all the same.

The Great Hall was just emptying, so Ginny was able to tuck the letter away inside her robes and hurry after Grace and Alden as they left.

"Hey, guys," Ginny called, falling into step with them. They were discussing the Charms homework, something that Ginny was involved with too, yet somehow their conversation seemed private

and special to them, so she didn't intrude. It gave her more time to think about what Tom had said.

It hurt her stomach to know that he was missing her so much that he would have a panic attack when she didn't reply immediately. Yes, he was more than slightly insecure, though she didn't blame him at all. He'd had not one good thing in his life before she met him, and he saw no reason why Fate shouldn't decide to steal her away as well.

She would reply as quickly as possible to this letter, she decided. Even if she didn't, the guilt would eat her, so she'd probably do it anyway.

The new Charms teacher, Ginny had been delighted to find, was none other than Professor Flitwick. It was strange at first. He was much younger, his hair was a dark, shiny brown... and he was quite a bit taller.

The other students made fun of him behind his back. It had become a sort of game to see how many height comments someone could slip into the lesson before they got in trouble. It was a game that Ginny had played before with Grace, only they did it to Madam Crofton, the librarian.

Now, at a quite convenient time, they were learning First Aid charms. As they practiced some of the intermediate healing spells, Ginny scowled, wondering why this class couldn't have come a day or two earlier, when she needed the knowledge.

xxx

Tom,

Oh, I feel really bad now, knowing that you were probably absolutely insane with panic. Don't worry. Breathe. I haven't been kidnapped and stolen away into the Forest, or anything like that. What are you considering doing, once you move on from Flourish and Blott's?

Claude isn't being that bad, and Scott hasn't done anything drastic. Other people are being worse, so I'm fine. I'm a big girl, remember?

Well, not height-wise, but still... speaking of short people, the new Charms teacher is Professor Flitwick. I think he's part-dwarf – he measures to my stomach. Now that's short. He's really nice, though, and quite funny. I like him.

Yes, I had tried out for the Quidditch team by the time your letter arrived! I'm still a Chaser. We have some new people – including Alden's brother, Dom, who's only a second-year! He's brilliant though. I won't bore you with any stuff like this year's tactics or who else got on the time. I know how fascinating you find Quidditch.

Nothing's happening at Hogwarts, everything's fine. A few broken hearts, a few broken faces... the usual standard of normality. Does Madam Malkin have a daughter? I didn't know that. It's awful, though. Send him my sympathies. I know how he feels. Multiplied by about a million. This is going to sound horrible, but how did she die? There's nothing of a killer in the Prophet.

I don't get depressed easily, Tom. You should know that a mere letter would do nothing to my cheeriness levels. What are you doing for Hallowe'en, by the way? Are you going to visit Hogwarts? According to Alden, they're making plans for a barbeque this year, on the grounds. I'm not sure if it's open to ex-students; I'll ask! If it is, are you going to make the scene? It is my birthday, you know... please?

Love, Ginny xxx

She looked over what she'd written and sighed. It should, hopefully, calm him down... except for a few things which she wished she could erase (like 'Scott hasn't done anything drastic', and 'other people are being worse'), but didn't dare, in case that made it for obvious that she was hiding things from him. He would already know too much.

There were so many things that she wanted to tell him. Like how the Gryffindors had attacked her, and how she'd broken Faisal Alfonso's jaw. Like how Heather Tristanebury hated her.

Ginny folded the letter away into an envelope, and stood to post it. "I'm going to the Owlery," she informed Alden, who was curled up in a chair reading a fat volume on Potions for extra information to put into

his Potions essay. He 'mm'ed absent-mindedly at her, not really paying attention, so she didn't say anymore.

Before going to the Owlery, she had something to do.

She made her way towards the third floor side-corridor abandoned girls' bathroom.

Checking first with a glance on either side that no-one was watching her, Ginny pushed her shoulder into the door and slipped through. It swung back towards the door-frame before she was through and closed on her foot.

"Ow," she complained, opening the door further to release her ankle.

"That was subtle," commented a gloomy voice from above.

Ginny looked up.

Sitting on one of the thick pipes that criss-crossed just below the ceiling, with her feet swinging down, was Moaning Myrtle Tristanebury, looking as miserable as ever. She blinked down at Ginny with round eyes like an owl's, as if trying to force tears into her eyes.

"Hi." Ginny waved feebly.

Myrtle didn't respond. She instead floated down, weightless, and sat on the walls of the nearest toilet cubicle. From her new vantage point, she stared at Ginny again.

"Um." The seventh-year was starting to feel uncomfortable. "Hi?" She tried again.

"What do you want?" Myrtle sniffed.

"I want to talk to you." Ginny hopped up and sat in one of the sinks. It hadn't been used in years, so it was dry. "How are you?"

"Dead."

“Apart from that.”

Myrtle slumped. She looked truly pathetic. “Awful. Heathie doesn’t want to visit me.” Ginny wondered for a moment who ‘Heathie’ was, but then understood when Myrtle continued, “And if my own baby sister doesn’t want to talk to me, then who does?”

“I do,” Ginny pointed out.

“You don’t count,” the ghost sniffed.

Well, thanks.

“You can’t really blame her,” Ginny said sympathetically. “I mean, she’d obviously prefer her last memory of you to be of you when you were alive than when... than when you’re a ghost, living in an abandoned toilet. Plus, she’s only eleven. She’s probably quite scared of ghosts. Give her time.”

“I suppose.” Myrtle didn’t look any happier, but her agreement was something. Then she looked up in interest, “Why does everyone think that you killed Professor Vander?”

Ginny snorted. “Do the people here need a reason?”

“I guess not. I just think it’s a bit ridiculous. You were here with me when it happened,” Myrtle said thoughtfully. “But then again, I was killed by the same person, so it could be suspicious...”

Something that had been bothering Ginny for quite a while came up. “Myrtle... you knew who the killer was all along, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did. And I’m guessing that you know, as well.” Myrtle pursed her lips. “I did try to tell you.”

“I know. It doesn’t matter, anyway. He told me himself.”

“Did he? Why?”

Because he fell in love with me.

Ginny didn't mention this, however. She didn't think that it would be a very good idea, telling Myrtle that she was currently going out with the person who murdered her.

"Can I ask you another question?" Ginny asked, expertly dodging Myrtle's own question. "If you knew who killed you... and who killed Vander... then why didn't you turn him in?"

"Two reasons. One: there was no-one to turn him in to. No-one comes in here to talk to me. The only person who ever has is you, and if you remember rightly, I did try and tell you what he was." Myrtle raised her eyebrows, and Ginny recalled that this was true. "And secondly... I don't know. I just... something about Riddle didn't seem like a killing kind of person. Do you know what I mean?"

This question remained unanswered. Ginny knew that if she'd already said too much. Myrtle already knew too much. She quickly excused herself, fabricating a lie on the spot, and disappearing through the door.

xxx

A/N: Lalala. Things are going to start getting interesting. Not that they weren't already fascinating. Anyway, you see the little clicky box? CLICK-CLICK. Review! You know you want to.

Next Time:

Ginevra,

Yes, something is wrong. Something is very wrong, and I didn't answer the question because I didn't want you to worry, but it doesn't matter because I'm worrying so why shouldn't you worry, yes, there is a reason... and I'm rambling again. I apologize. I know that I'm being silly, and I've just totally disregarded the rest of your letter to reply to this, sorry-

xxx

I posted a song on itunes! Go me! It's really bad, though, because I only recorded it on my laptop... still! Yay!

Chapter Five: Green Secrets

"If you knew who killed you... and who killed Vander... then why didn't you turn him in?"

"Two reasons. One: there was no-one to turn him in to. No-one comes in here to talk to me. The only person who ever has is you, and if you remember rightly, I did try and tell you what he was." Myrtle raised her eyebrows, and Ginny recalled that this was true. "And secondly... I don't know. I just... something about Riddle didn't seem like a killing kind of person. Do you know what I mean?"

This question remained unanswered. Ginny knew that if she'd already said too much. Myrtle already knew too much. She quickly excused herself, fabricating a lie on the spot, and disappearing through the door.

xxx

Ginevra,

I wasn't panicking. I was fine. Once I leave, I was thinking about maybe seeing if I can get anything in the Ministry... or I might just try my own success for luck. What exactly do you mean by 'nothing drastic'? You classify my... problem – as 'nothing drastic'. Saying that is going to get me worried, if anything. 'Other people are being worse'? What's happening?

Flitwick? I heard somewhere that he might take over. I didn't take it seriously, as I also heard that the options for the Charms Professor ranged from the Minister for Magic to a Bulgarian Veela. Well, if you've got a teacher who you like, then it might ease off your annoyance with Slughorn. Well done on making the team, by the way, though I knew that you would. Give Philips congratulations for his brother.

I am aware that it's your birthday. I haven't forgotten. I don't know if I'm free, then; I'll find out. Anyway, I'm not sure that I'd be welcome there. With my astonishing popularity, I'm sure that they'd greet me with open arms and take me in lovingly... if I can't, you could always

visit me – though you'd probably want to stay at the castle with Philips and Hartwin and Roosevelt.

Tom

xxx

Tom,

Oh, of course. You were absolutely fine. I just had this frightening mental video of you rushing around like a headless chicken, telling yourself not to panic but panicking anyway... but you were fine, so that was just my imagination... I'm raising my eyebrows sarcastically here, but you can't see that, so I thought I'd put that in.

Thanks – but getting on the team wasn't that hard. The standards of the people who try out have dropped by quite a bit. Not to sound arrogant, but I don't really have to even try out. Dom was amazing though, you should have seen him. You probably wouldn't appreciate his talent though. I'm surprised that you know how the game works!

Aw, I've invited you! That should be reason enough. Me and Grace and Alden and maybe Dom, we'd all welcome you! We'd even get a banner and everything, if you like. If you really don't want to come – but I think you really should, it'll be fantastic – then I'll come and visit you.

I noticed something in your letter, Mr. I'm-Going-To-Avoid-Certain-Questions. I asked, though it was a bit rude, how Madam Malkin's daughter died... was there some reason for why you didn't answer? Is there something wrong?

Love, Ginny xxx

xxx

Ginevra,

Yes, something is wrong. Something is very wrong, and I didn't answer the question because I didn't want you to worry, but it doesn't

matter because I'm worrying so why shouldn't you worry, yes, there is a reason... and I'm rambling again. I apologize. I know that I'm being silly, and I've just totally disregarded the rest of your letter to reply to this, sorry-

It's just I can't remember where exactly I was when Madam Malkin's daughter was killed.

Tom

Ginny's heart skipped a couple of beats, then throbbed twice as hard, making her healed – but still sore – knuckles pound. Oh, this was bad. This was very, very bad. Tom couldn't remember where he'd been. This wasn't just some thing, like he'd been busy for a while, and had gone into a bit of daydream and couldn't remember what he'd been doing previously. Tom had a photographic memory-

And if he couldn't remember where he'd been, then it meant that he hadn't been in control of his mind.

She tried to stay calm.

She started hyperventilating anyway.

"Hey, are you okay?" Alden frowned.

No, I'm not! She pinched her nose and held her breath for a while before sucking in a deep breath and trying to calm herself down.

"Do you want a paper bag?" Grace asked.

"No, I'm fine." Ginny took another deep breath. She was tempted to flap her hands by her face like the girls do in all the corny films, but stopped herself from looking like a bimbo in front of the population of the Slytherin common room just in time. "Just... some bad news."

"What bad news?" Grace leaned over to look at the letter.

Ginny snatched the parchment to her chest, holding it so tightly that the paper crumpled. "Nothing. Never mind."

Neither of them looked impressed by this hyperventilating-and-then-privacy idea. She felt bad for getting them anxious about her and then not telling them why, but there were secrets she had to protect. Secrets that she couldn't tell anyone. Secrets like how her boyfriend had an alter-ego that had probably killed Madam Malkin's daughter a week ago.

"Are you sure that you're-"

"Yeah, no need to flip or anything..." Ginny gave them her brightest smile.

Grace wasn't fooled. She stood, grabbed the redhead by the crook of her elbow, and dragged her into the corner. "What's going on?" she asked under her breath. "Is everything okay?"

"Nothing, it's all cool."

"Ginny, you started hyperventilating."

She sighed. "Grace, haven't you ever had a secret? A secret that you couldn't tell to anyone, not a single soul, even if you really wanted to? A secret that wasn't yours to tell?" she pleaded. "I would tell you but I can't. I'm sorry."

"Okay..." Grace looked reluctant, but she nodded. "Like how I couldn't tell anyone when you were... you know, leaving?" she verified.

"Yeah, like that. Only so much more serious." Ginny pushed a hand roughly backwards through her hair, causing it to spill crazily around her shoulders like blood. How ironically fitting.

"Your hair's getting really long," commented Grace. Ginny was grateful for the topic change. "When did you last get it cut?"

"Um." Ginny pulled on a strand of scarlet hair and observed the split-ends. "A couple of years ago, maybe?" She didn't remember. The last hair-cut that she could recall clearly was when just before she turned

sixteen, but she might have had a snip since then – she had tuned out several years of her life from her memory so that she wouldn't have to think about the War all the time. She'd recovered from the nightmares and screaming fits a while back, but that was thanks to the effective blocking of memories.

"Whoa!" Grace gaped at her. "That explains a lot! Geez. Before the barbeque, you and me are going out to cut your hair in town. When's the next Hogsmeade weekend?"

Ginny glanced across at the Slytherin notice-board and squinted to read it from such a long distance. "Um... next week, I think."

"Okay, then. Your hair can last that long, if it's lasted years and years without being cut." Grace peered into her face. "I think you'd suit quite short hair."

"Me, too. What do you say I shave it all off?" Ginny asked, with such a serious expression on her face that gullible Grace believed her for a second. Then they burst out laughing, and anxious Alden across the room looked back down at his homework, instead of staring worriedly at the bad-news conversation they could've been having.

Once Alden had been briefly comforted that everything was okay, Ginny fetched her writing things and replied as quickly as possible to Tom's letter.

Tom,

Don't worry. I'm sure it's all fine. There's so much evidence that you would need to prove that it's you. Maybe you were just tired, and fell into a doze for a few minutes, and then a falling book woke you up or something. Hey, maybe you sleepwalked! Who knows? I sleepwalked once when I was eight, and I left the house! I walked about a mile and then curled up underneath a tree. When I woke up, I was so far from home, in my pyjamas, on some random Muggle's farm, under his orange tree. They went ape when I appeared there! So don't panic, it's going to be okay.

Love, Ginny xxx

P.S. Breathe. In – out. In – out. Good beaver.

Ginny glanced over what she'd written. It was pretty much all nonsense and rambling, designed to make him laugh or to distract him from worrying. It probably wouldn't work, as he could detect her distraction techniques in the blink of an eye, but it was always worth a shot.

xxx

On Thursdays, Ginny had a free period just before lunch, after Defence Against The Dark Arts. It was during this period that she was lolled out on one of the Slytherin sofas, attempting to finish her Astronomy chart. Alden was at a desk, doing his homework the proper way, as opposed to sprawling on comfortable furniture and scribbling down a word now and then. Grace was on a nearby armchair, following Ginny's example.

"Graaaaaace..." Ginny called, drawing out the name like bubblegum. "What goes in box 21-F?"

"No idea. Have you got box 13-C?"

"Duh!" Ginny gave her friend a withering look. "It's Jupiter, you Muppet."

"I'm a what now?" Grace stared at her.

"Um. Muppet. It's... it's an Irish thing," Ginny improvised hastily, remembering that the famous Muggle puppets would not be invented for a few decades yet.

"It doesn't sound very Irish," said Alden from the desk behind them.

Ginny was opening her mouth to crossly retort something along the lines of 'silence, you unhelpful...' when the fire crackled and turned green. She cut herself off and watched the flames turn the colour of Floo - green, purple, red, purple, green-

And then Tom's face appeared in the flames.

Ginny rolled sideways off the sofa in surprise and landed on her ink-pot, which exploded quite spectacularly all over the leg of her dungarees. "Damn!" She wiped glass from the fabric and scrambled closer to the fire, sitting on her heels and peering into the flames. "Hello."

"It's Riddle!" exclaimed Grace, who'd only just noticed.

"No, Grace, Riddle came a week ago, you've just missed him," said Alden wryly.

Ginny was going to chatter happily away to him, but then she noticed the look on his face. Without taking her gaze from his almost-agonized eyes, she said loudly, "Grace? Alden?"

"Mm-hm?"

"Yarr?"

"Can you go away for a second? Not to be rude, or anything, but... hit the gas." There were no sounds of movement. Ginny tore her eyes from Tom's face and looked over her shoulder. "Now, preferably?" She locked eyes with Grace meaningfully, who understood.

"Oh!" Grace leapt up, grabbed Alden, and dragged him from the common room. Thankfully, there was no-one else in the common room, as it was warm today, and everyone else was outside. That made it a hell of a lot easier. "Tell me when we can come back in. I'll even be nice and not listen at the wall or anything."

"Thanks," Ginny called. She cast a Silencing Charm on the walls, just to be sure. Then she turned back to Tom. "What's happened?"

Glancing sideways and seeing that his cue had fallen now that the others had left, he started to talk, beginning normally, but then speeding up into his usual rapid-fire ramble that he always got into whenever he was nervous or upset.

"I looked at your time-table over the summer, so I knew when your free-periods were so that if I had to, I could visit you, and now I have to, well, I already have, so technically – but anyway, I was really worried that loads of other people were going to be here, but luckily there aren't, because I have to tell you-"

"Spit it out."

"I remembered where I was when Amaris Malkin was killed." His eyes were wide and masked as best as he could, but the pain was still apparent. "I remembered what I was doing."

Ginny clicked everything together without needing so much as ten seconds. Her blood ran cold, and she felt slightly sick. "It was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Yes, it was – and – I only realised today – because – because I overheard some of the other employees talking, and they were talking about me, and they said that last week I'd skived off work because I'd stood outside for like twenty minutes, and I didn't realise that I'd been outside that long, because I was really annoyed, so I went outside to get a breath of fresh air and to calm down, but then suddenly I was a metre sideways from where I'd been standing before, but I ignored it, I just assumed that maybe that was where I had been all along, then I heard that Miss Malkin had been killed, but I didn't think anything of it because I'd only been outside for a minute or two, and I couldn't have possibly attacked anyway in that time, and then I found out that I'd been outside for twenty minutes, and that was why I'd mysteriously moved a metre to my left, because I'd been taken over and then gone and killed her and come back and tried to stand in pretty much the same place, but I got it wrong, and then it was back to being me again and oh God I've killed someone again!"

He was hyperventilating like crazy.

And she thought that she had problems.

"It's okay, don't worry, no-one knows, just calm down, it's okay-"

"It's not okay!" Tom said. "It's not o-freaking-kay, alright? I've – I've – and I didn't mean to – and I didn't even realise – and I was trying so hard to be normal – and it's not – it's just – I – I can't-"

"Stop!" Ginny held her hand up, cutting off his stammer of speech. "Look at me."

His eyes were flickering everywhere, in pace with his breathing.

"Look at me." She reached into the fire and felt the familiar tickling sensation of the Floo-powdered fire, then that changed to the feel of Tom's face under her fingers, and she twisted it to look at her. "Tom."

Finally, Tom looked up at her, his eyes changing colours in the warped firelight – from their usual dark hue to purple and green. His expression softened slightly, and his breathing slowed down.

"Breathe."

He did as instructed, still staring up at her, which was bizarre in itself, as she was used to him being so much taller than her. Slowly she could see him calming down.

"It's okay," she said softly. "I'm here, right? And nothing else matters."

"Yes, you're here now," said Tom angrily, his calm aura shattering. "What about tomorrow? What about the next I panic or get annoyed by some stupid employee making a derogatory comment, or by some mental customer? You're not always going to be there to hold my hand and babysit me – and – and – and make sure that I don't go and kill people!"

"Don't worry," Ginny told him gently, though it was something that was worrying her greatly. What sort of life would this be? Not just for him, but for her as well? "It's all going to be fine. Don't worry."

Tom sighed, suddenly resigned, as though he'd lost the will to fight. "I apologize for being like this. For being so..." There wasn't really a word for it, and he trailed away, not finding the words that he was searching for.

"It's alright." Ginny drew her hand back from the flames, her fingertips skimming his cheekbone as she pulled away. "Are you going to come to the barbeque next month?"

"I might as well. I don't trust myself anymore," Tom muttered darkly.

"Hey, cheer up." Ginny smiled widely and brightly enough for the both of them. "Everything's going to be okay, see?"

The only thing was that she had no idea if everything would be okay in the end.

xxx

Due to Ginny's panic about Tom, she was falling behind in her studies. She was even doing badly in Defence Against the Dark Arts, which was usually her best subject. She'd come top of the year for her OWLs in that class, but was slowly slipping. It was hard for her to concentrate on Astronomy, and Potions was more difficult than ever.

She'd totally failed to comprehend what had been going on in Herbology, and been set a whole extra chapter of homework to hand in as soon as possible. It had taken her the whole weekend to finish it, and now she headed down towards the Greenhouses to give it in to Professor Ornella, the Italian-English Herbology teacher.

Ornella wasn't in there when she reached the Greenhouses; Ginny left the numerous essays on the Professor's desk and moved back out through the door, dodging Venus fly-traps and Venomous Tentacula as she went.

As September drew to a close, the weather was getting colder, but it was still reasonably warm. The more cold-and-cough-susceptible of students already had donned their scarves and woollen hats.

"Hey."

A smooth voice from behind her made Ginny start, and she turned to see Bernard Terby leaning casually against the stone wall of the castle, watching her with interest, a lazy smile stretched on his lips.

“Oh. Hi.” Ginny wondered what he was doing here, but smiled politely anyway. She didn’t really know him well enough for a decent conversation – she didn’t know him at all, seeing as he was in the year below her – but that was no reason not to try.

“I’m Bernard,” he introduced himself coolly, pushing himself off the wall with one shoulder and sauntering towards her.

“Yeah, I know,” Ginny replied, then flushed. That sounded weird, like she’d been following him or something. “Jack announced your name on the Quidditch try-outs,” she explained.

“Oh, right,” he grinned at her. “Congrats, by the way, on makin’ the team.”

“Thanks. You too.”

“It’s Ginny, right?”

He knows my name... Ginny’s eyes unfocused, but then she mentally slapped herself. Damn! Stop it.

“Yeah,” she said. “That’s me. How did you know to call me Ginny, and not Ginevra, or something?”

Bernard winked. “I hear things.”

Think of Tom, think of Tom, think of Tom, Ginny told herself desperately in an attempt to distract herself from the dazzling smile and light green eyes like jade. Which only drew her attention to them even more.

“So how you been?” he continued. “Cause I haven’t been doin’ too well... but so far, seeing you has made my day-”

She went red.

“Ginny!”

Scott appeared by her side, looking extremely cross.

“Yeah, Scott?” she asked absently, looking intently at him to stop herself from turning redder than she already was and giggling like a maniac.

“Why are you so red?” he frowned.

And the giggling broke out.

“What did you do to her?” Scott snarled at Bernard, wrapping a protective arm around her shoulders and pulling her to him.

“Just a little of the old charm, Reeve,” Bernard said smoothly, smirking.

“Get off,” Ginny said, mildly annoyed, shrugging Scott’s hand away from her shoulder and twisting away from him. She now found herself standing in between him and Bernard. The Ravenclaw was glaring, while the younger Slytherin male was smirking still, seeming to love every second of this argument.

Scott looked slightly hurt at her rejection of his hold, but hid it quickly. “Anyway, Ginny, I wanted to ask what you were doing for next Hogsmeade weekend... are you free?” he asked hopefully.

Ginny sighed, her happy bubble popped. Here she was, attempting to be friends with Scott instead of trying to kill him for what he did to her, trying to be nice, and he had to spoil everything by making moves on her all the time.

“I told you, Scott, no-” She looked at him, a little sadly, disappointed that he couldn’t take the hint that she didn’t want to go out with him again.

Bernard chuckled.

“-I’m still with Tom,” she finished.

Bernard stopped laughing. “Riddle?”

“Anyway, I’m going to Hogsmeade with Grace, and I don’t think she likes you after the Yule Ball, when you made a move on her,” Ginny continued. “So... no, sorry.”

Scott looked disappointed, but not too unhappy about it.

“Riddle?” Bernard asked casually, as though he really couldn’t care, though Ginny strongly suspected that he did care. A lot.

“Yeah.” Ginny frowned at him. “What’s it to you?”

He shook his head, soft brown hair sweeping over his face so that Ginny’s breath caught despite herself. “Nothing,” he said suavely. “I just wasn’t sure which ‘Tom’ you were referring to. Tall ex-Head Boy, right?”

“That’s the one.”

“He seemed a bit...” Bernard seemed to choosing his words carefully. Ginny hoped for his sake that he was, because if he said the wrong thing then she was going to hit him, and she really didn’t want to have to ruin his pretty face- “distant. Or perhaps that was just me.”

Ginny uncurled her hands from the fists that they’d instinctively formed. Distant. That worked. She didn’t have to break his nose now. “Not really,” she said defensively, even though there was no need to defend, as Bernard had said nothing offensive.

“Isn’t he a bit old for you?” Bernard enquired nonchalantly.

“As opposed to a year younger?” Scott shot back, still scowling.

Bernard ignored this. So did Ginny. She didn’t know what Scott was talking about, but whatever he was suggesting – it was insane. She didn’t fancy Bernard, with his insanely good looks and charm and wit

and friendly attitude... not even a tiny bit. And he certainly didn't fancy her.

"Old?" she frowned. "He's almost exactly six months older than me. That's hardly anything."

The other Slytherin seemed to be working something out in his head, but didn't say anything about what he was thinking. She must imagined the flicker of annoyance in his eyes, because though she swore she seen it, he flashed another brilliant smile and seemed to be fine.

She was practically melting into a puddle at his feet; she sickened herself.

"Well, I'm going to go," she excused herself, desperate to get away before she did something really stupid like trying to touch his soft, shiny brown hair.

"Are you going back to the Slytherin common room?" asked Bernard, his green eyes smouldering. "I'll come with you."

"No, I'm going to see Dumbledore," she lied, knowing that his office was right opposite the Ravenclaw common room. She wanted to talk to Scott, alone. She just hoped that he wouldn't get the wrong impression from that.

"I can take you there," said Scott. His voice didn't sound in any way different to all the other times, but she could see his happiness in his brown eyes.

"I'll come too," said Bernard. "I have some free time."

"Er. I heard someone say that Weasley wanted to talk to you," Ginny improvised further, mentioning her grandfather merely for the sake of someone important who was very far from the Ravenclaw common room.

"I didn't," replied Bernard evenly.

“Well, I did.”

“Terby, just go,” Scott said irritably.

Bernard looked at her for support in his case – he wanted to come with her, not go and see the stinky old caretaker. Please, his eyes said. You know that I’m so good-looking... you want me to come with you.

Ginny ignored his handsome, pleading face. “Bernard. Go.”

He left, his walk smooth and jaunty, an arrogant sort of stride... a walk that moved his hair from side to side in the most attractive way-

FOCUS.

She twisted her face away from staring after the sixth-year, and turned back to Scott. “Come on, then,” she told him cheerfully. “Let’s go up and see Dumbledore.”

Halfway up the stairs, towards the office that Ginny didn’t need to visit, Scott asked quietly, “Do you actually need to see Dumbledore?” His strangely omniscient eyes flickered towards her, seeming to know the answer before she said it.

The redhead sighed. “No. You caught me.” She smiled ruefully, but then remembered why she’d come with Scott. “Look, I need to talk to you.” She sat down on one of the marble steps and looked up at Scott, indicating for him to sit beside her. He did as requested.

“So. What d’you want to talk to me about, then?”

Oh, this was going to be difficult.

“You’re not going to like me after I say this... oh well. Scott... you still like me, don’t you?” she verified.

His eyes narrowed warily. “Yeah...” he said uncomfortably, stuffing his hands into his trousers pockets. “Why?”

"I just... I feel like I have to set everything straight between you and me, because if I don't, then it's going to be like I'm misleading you and making you believe things that aren't true... I haven't told anyone this, Scott, so I'm personally trusting you with this – like I trusted you with the secrets about my family, which you so kindly blabbed to the world-"

"I only told Ishbel, by accident!" he blurted out. "It was an accident, I didn't mean to tell her. I made her swear not to tell, but she told anyway. I'm sorry."

"Scott, no offence, but I don't care who you told and why... the point is that I have to tell you that... I love Tom."

There was no reaction.

Ginny swallowed, and tried again. "I'm not just going out with him because – because, I don't know, because I think he's good-looking or something. Whatever. I actually love him, and I'm probably going to always love him. I just didn't think it was fair that I didn't tell you... in case you thought that I liked you as anything more than a friend. I'm sorry."

Scott stared at her. She could see nothing in his face. Then, finally he nodded.

"Okay," he said slowly. "Okay, I understand. I won't tell anyone. I promise."

"Thanks, Scott. I'm so sorry." She gave him a hug, only intending it to be quick, but he twined his arms around her back and held her tightly. For a minute or two, Ginny withstood the hugging before getting annoyed. "Scott..." she said in a warning tone, though softly, as she was trying to be nice to him, in case she'd broken his heart or something.

"Yeah, right, okay." He let go of her and shifted back rapidly. "My bad. Oops. Remind me not to do that."

She grinned at him. "It's okay. It's just that I couldn't breathe."

He grinned in return, and a brown-haired figure dressed in green spied on them from the bottom of the stairs. Bernard turned on his heel and stormed away down the corridor. Dressed in green, coloured green.

xxx

A/N: Haha. Yeah, pretty much everyone fancies her now. Well, not everyone. But still. REVIEW! And tell me what you think of this plot twist!

Next Time:

Grace gasped, holding the Daily Prophet at arms' length.

"What now?" asked Alden boredly, who was used to Grace's morning-time exclamations of 'oh no someone ran over a cat' or something likewise. "What poor fluffy creature has been killed now?"

"A person – Madam Malkin's daughter!"

Ginny dropped her plate.

xxx

I posted another song on itunes! I'M A MUSICAL GENIUS!

Chapter Six: Slytherinisms

“Yes, you’re here now,” said Tom angrily, his calm aura shattering. “What about tomorrow? What about the next I panic or get annoyed by some stupid employee making a derogatory comment, or by some mental customer? You’re not always going to be there to hold my hand and babysit me – and – and – and make sure that I don’t go and kill people!”

“Hey, cheer up.” Ginny smiled widely and brightly enough for the both of them. “Everything’s going to be okay, see?” The only thing was that she had no idea if everything would be okay in the end.

“Thanks, Scott. I’m so sorry.” She gave him a hug, only intending it to be quick, but he twined his arms around her back and held her tightly. A brown-haired figure dressed in green spied on them from the bottom of the stairs. Bernard turned on his heel and stormed away down the corridor. Dressed in green, coloured green.

xxx

Grace gasped, holding the Daily Prophet at arms’ length so that the corner dragged through her jam and toast, getting the paper covered in red slime.

“What now?” asked Alden boredly, who was used to Grace’s morning-time exclamations of ‘oh no someone ran over a cat’ or something likewise. “What poor fluffy creature has been killed now?”

“A person – Madam Malkin’s daughter!”

Ginny dropped her plate.

It smashed into a thousand pieces, spraying sausages and baked beans across the floor.

“Are you okay?” asked Flora interestedly from across the table. The blonde usually hung out with a group of fashion-obsessed Ravenclaws now, as apparently Grace and Ginny didn’t appreciate

clothes and make-up enough, despite the fact that both Slytherin girls wore their colourful eyeliner almost religiously.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Ginny muttered. She drew out her wand and cleaned up the mess quickly, Banishing the shards of plate to the kitchens and Scourgifying the slime of sausage fat and tomato sauce. “Butter fingers. My hand slipped.”

“Okay. Be careful.” Flora returned to chatting with her Ravenclaw friends, who were reluctantly daring to sit at the Slytherin table with the intimidating fellows of the snake house. Ginny didn’t really know any of them, but she knew their names. There was a pretty blonde, the same sort of make as Flora, called Elizabeth; the Head Girl, Penelope Dann; and a Native American-looking girl named Adane.

Ginny wiped the baked beans sauce from her fingers onto her school skirt. She sat back down and tuned into what Grace was telling Alden as she put sausages onto the new plate that had just appeared in front of her, courtesy of the House-elves slaving away in the kitchens.

“-and they found her outside of Madam Malkin’s at about three o’clock it says... like she was savaged-”

She dropped the second plate.

“Not again,” Flora moaned.

“Ginny, is something wrong?” Grace asked, frowning. “You keep dropping things. Hogwarts is going to run out of plates if you keep up like this.”

“Sorry,” Ginny mumbled. “I’m not really paying attention today.”

“Is everything alright? Do you want us to take you to the Hospital Wing?” Grace looked quite worried with Ginny’s health – both physical and perhaps mental as well.

“I’m okay, don’t worry.” Ginny looked at the third plate that had come out thin air on the table in front of her. She wasn’t hungry anymore. A lot of people were staring. “Actually, I don’t feel so hot after all. I might

just pop up to see Madam Royce. I'll see you in Defence Against the Dark Arts."

"Alright..." Grace didn't look consoled. "I'll see you later."

Ginny felt slightly sick as she stumbled from the Great Hall. However, what bothered her more than anything was the expression on Alden's face... like he was just starting to work something out.

xxx

"I reckon I should be a detective when I'm older," commented Grace, stroking her chin between writing down answers on the Defence Against the Dark Arts pop quiz sheet that they were sharing. "I'm so good at this."

"Grace, so far the suspects you've named are everyone in Diagon Alley," Alden pointed out. Ginny didn't miss that his eyes flashed briefly towards her; she had been very jumpy when she listed Tom.

"It didn't necessarily have to be someone in Diagon Alley," Ginny said casually, though her finger was twitching. She supplied one of the answers for the quiz.

"It could have been..." A devilish grin crept onto Grace's face. "You know who I bet it was?"

"Who?" Alden sighed, ready for another stupid accusation.

"Riddle."

Ginny dropped the quill, spraying ink across the desk. "Oh God, I'm sorry. I went to see Madam Royce," she lied, "but it didn't really help. I'm just sort of spazzy today."

"How do we know the difference?" Grace teased, but Alden was staring at the redhead again.

Ginny didn't like that look at all, and she looked away. She picked up her quill and cleaned up the spilt ink. "No use crying over spilt ink," she joked.

Alden's gaze snapped away from Ginny, and he took the quill from Ginny to write a few more answers down. "So what makes you think it's Riddle?" he asked Grace teasingly.

"Well, he was there..."

"And so were a thousand other people!" Ginny cut in frantically. "That doesn't mean that all of them killed Amaris Malkin!"

Alden stared at her. "Ginny..." he said slowly. "I don't think that the Prophet ever mentioned the victim's name."

Red blood cells swarmed into Ginny's pale, freckled cheeks. Damnit, if anyone was going to reveal Tom, it was going to be her! She clamped her mouth shut and swore not to say anything else.

"How did you know who it was?" asked Grace interestedly. Grace was so clueless, bless her.

"Tom told me," she said stiffly. It was in all honesty – he had told her. "He was only a few shops away from where it happened. Everyone in that area knew."

"Oh, okay," said Alden. "Never mind."

"Okay, that's all the time we have, class," Professor Devin called out to the students. "Please put the quizzes in a neat pile on my desk, and then you're dismissed."

Alden, Grace and Ginny packed their things; Alden was the one who took the quiz up to the desk, and then he turned back to Grace as the three of them left the classroom to their next lesson – for Grace, History of Magic, for Alden and Ginny, Muggle Studies. "So what are your other theories on Riddle?"

“It wasn’t him!” Ginny burst out. “Why can’t you blame someone else? It wasn’t him. Tom was working in Flourish and Blott’s at the time, he didn’t know anything until he was told by his employer, he didn’t do it!”

“Relax, Ginny. It’s only a joke.” Now Grace looked seriously concerned for her friend’s health.

“Joke? It’s not funny!”

Oh God. She was shrieking. This was getting embarrassing, and she couldn’t stop.

“What’s your problem, Ginny? We’re not serious!”

The change in Alden was astonishing as he took control of the situation. It became even more obvious that he’d grown a lot over the summer – he was now slightly taller than Ginny, instead of being a bit shorter. “Grace, go to History of Magic,” he commanded. “Ginny, you’re coming with me.”

Alarmed, Ginny followed the other Slytherin, not saying goodbye to Grace as she left. She tried to control her breathing so that when she spoke next, it wasn’t going to sound as though she’d inhaled helium.

Alden stopped in a corner and cast the Silencing Charm on the space around them so that they were in a little muted bubble. “Okay, Ginny, listen to me. I’m going to ask you a very serious question, and you’re going to give me a very serious answer. Is that understood?”

“Er, yeah. Why – what’s going o-”

“Riddle killed Amaris Malkin, didn’t he?”

Ginny abruptly choked on air. She spluttered for a second, trying to regain her breath. She had expected that he would find out, but no way this fast, no way this harshly. It was a cold punch in the stomach. “I – I don’t – no – I-”

“I asked for a very serious answer,” Alden said icily, and now Ginny finally saw why he was in the Slytherin house. There was no friendly, thoughtful expression in his face now.

She swallowed hard around a lump in her throat the size of a tennis ball. Looking as though she was still thinking very hard, stammering still even though she could breathe and talk now, she let her fingers wander around her side to where her wand was stored-

Whipped it out – rammed Alden up against the wall – jammed the tip into the base of his throat –

Alden may have grown quite a bit, but he was still the geek that he’d always been, and Ginny, who played Quidditch, was quite a lot stronger. She used this to her advantage.

“If you breathe a word then I’ll blow your head off, regardless of whether or not you happen to be my best friend,” she hissed. “Trust me, I know the spell, and don’t tell me that I wouldn’t dare.”

He stared down at her. At first, he had looked shocked, but now his features had settled into a calm look. He didn’t say anything – he probably couldn’t, with her wand stabbed into his throat.

Ginny glared at him. “Yes,” she said shortly, reluctantly revealing what she’d sworn on her life that she wouldn’t tell a soul. “Yes, he did.”

“Why?” His voice was strangled past the wand-tip in his windpipe.

She smiled mockingly at him, the expression harsh and strange on her heart-shaped face. “If I told you that, I’d have to kill you,” she said softly, her voice like cobra venom – tiny, gentle, lethal.

Alden tilted his head slightly. “Touché.” He huffed out his breath. “Well? Don’t you want to know how I worked it out?”

“Not really.”

“I’m ashamed to admit that I based my hypothesis on the rumours,” Alden began. “I began thinking about how everyone said that you were the Hogwarts killer. How was it possible that you could have killed Myrtle as well when you weren’t at Hogwarts yet? However, everything else that the rumours had said added up... then I remembered. You weren’t here... but Riddle was. Then, a few days after the Prophet today said that Madam Malkin’s daughter had died, you get a letter of ‘bad news’. The next day, Tom appears in the fireplace, extremely panicked about something that none of us are allowed to hear. Then, this morning, at every mention of either the murder, or Riddle – or especially both – you drop something or get really hysterical... it was simply Arithmancy.”

The smug smirk at his own intelligence was infuriating. Never before had Ginny felt tempted to attack Alden, one of her best friends, but there had to be a first time for everything, right?

“Ginny...” said Alden, drawing out the final syllable of her name. “Riddle doesn’t kill intentionally, does he?”

She looked at him sharply. Divulging one of the deadly secrets was one thing, but exposing both would guarantee death, or a break-up, or possibly both, knowing how unstable Tom’s alter-ego was right now.

He raised one eyebrow, waiting for an answer.

“No, he doesn’t, and no, I’m not going to tell you anymore,” Ginny snapped. “I know that you’re one of my best friends, Alden, but don’t underestimate the fact that I’ll rip you to pieces if you breathe a word of this to anyone – especially Grace.”

“Why especially her?” Alden asked curiously.

“Because she can’t keep her mouth shut,” Ginny said, with a slightly duh tone to her voice, because after all, it was fairly obvious. She put Alden down, let go of him at hostage point, disassembled the Silencing bubble and then walked with him to Muggle Studies.

There was an awkward, tense silence all the way to class.

xxx

Guilt is an evil, evil thing. It was eating away at Ginny, piece by piece as the days went by. She couldn't help but feel awful; she given away one Tom's secrets that she'd promised above all that she'd never tell.

Promises were made to be kept, not to be broken.

Grace was worried by Alden and Ginny's sudden rivalry, and also why they were so unlike themselves now. Alden buried himself more into his studies than ever, similar to when he and Grace had just broken up and he had wanted to avoid seeing her; Ginny was quiet and moody.

Even the Hogsmeade weekend didn't cheer her up. Getting her hair cut and seeing wave after tangled wave of scarlet hair falling to the floor, even, did nothing for her cheeriness. She really didn't want to see Tom on Hallowe'en now – it would be her birthday, and he would be so sweet to her, and it would make her feel even worse, because he was so wonderful when she'd betrayed him.

Her hair was now chin-length, and of a glossy, shiny texture than even Flora envied now, something never heard of before. She hadn't asked to have it styled, as that would require a lot of effort to maintain, something that she could never be bothered with. At least with short hair it didn't get quite so tangled.

It was early October now; Ginny and Alden had not yet made friends. Twenty-seven days until her birthday. Despite still firmly holding her side of the feud, she desperately wanted to be friends with him again in time for her birthday. However, she was much too stubborn to apologise, and she didn't think that he was ever going to, so it looked as though her wish wasn't going to come true.

A tall, lean figure stalked past her without so much as a 'hello'. Ginny saw who it was, and felt a bit disappointed that he hadn't noticed her, and offended, because it was a strong possibility that he had noticed her, but had simply ignored her.

“Bernard!” she called after the younger Slytherin.

Bernard Terby turned around to face her. His hair spun around sideways, falling into his face, drifting across his eyes – which were narrowed at her. He was annoyed about something. He wasn’t angry enough to show the emotion with his whole face (fury was ugly, and she was glad that he didn’t scar his own beauty by scowling), but he was definitely pretty pissed.

“Ginny,” he acknowledged her, with a curt nod of his head. Again, his hair fell everywhere. The light caught a few strands, and his head glimmered bronze and gold. She wondered what shampoo he used, before shaking herself out of her pathetic awe-struck state. He was a year below her in age, and he was arrogant, and she had a boyfriend, and just because he happened to look like a Greek God in the sunlight didn’t mean anything...

“Are you angry with me?” she asked.

“No,” he said, twisting the corner of his mouth sideways in a crooked half-pout. “I’m simply worried for you, Ginny.” He stepped closer to her and looked down into her eyes with his own smouldering green ones. “I saw you with Scott on the stairs... embracin’. He’s dangerous, Ginny, and I just can’t bear to see you be harmed.”

Her heart spluttered a few beats before becoming normal again. Wow... she meant something to this incredibly attractive boy – no! Bad! She inwardly slapped herself around the face.

“I won’t,” she promised him. “I’m a big girl. I can handle myself.”

“I know,” Bernard murmured. He moved a step closer. “I like your hair, by the way...” with one finger, he pushed her crimson tresses behind her ear... travelled his hand down... balanced his finger under her slightly pointy chin... tilted her face up...

WHOA. NOT GOING THERE.

Ginny stepped back sharply upon realising what he was trying to do. Her heart was pounding in her chest as she stared up at him in horror.

What was it with everyone making moves on her this year? She tried to tell him off, to tell him to back off, but she was still recovering from shock, and couldn't speak.

"Too fast?" he whispered. "I'm sorry." He smiled lazily. "Take two."

"No!" She found her voice suddenly, and took another step back, away from him, followed by another and another until her back hit the wall. "No, no no no, okay? No, Bernard. I told you last week, same time as I told Scott – I'm with Tom, and I don't plan to end it with him any time in the foreseeable future, so... just, no."

"Riddle ain't here though, is he?" Bernard purred, moving closer again.

"Bernard!" She shoved him backwards as hard as she could. "What kind of person do you take me for?"

He didn't answer. He just looked down so that his hair swooshed down into his strong face, pouting slightly. It looked adorable – and it was not going to work on her! The way that he could adapt his face and change the emotions of everyone around him was just so... so Slytherin!

Well, it isn't going to have any effect!

"Get lost," she told him, and left before he could work his charms on her again.

xxx

A/N: Oh dear. Poor Ginny. Three hot guys like her. Oh no. Whereas I have none. I ought to strangle her. –scowl- Just kidding. I love you all, thanks so much for reviewing all the time... why don't you review again? –hint hint-

Next Time:

"Ssh!" Ginny hissed. She sighed again. "Yes, okay? He is. I'm not denying it. Anyway, I was talking to him by the greenhouses, and

then Scott came over. Scott told me earlier that he still liked me loads, and he looked really angry that I was talking to Bernard... probably because I was being really obvious that I thought he was good-looking. I was giggling and everything.”

Grace chuckled. “I can just imagine this red-faced Ginny laughing hysterically while surrounded on both sides by attractive boys!”

xxx

OMG I LOVE doing Backtrack. It’s so sweet! I skipped ahead loads just so that I could translate into his POV the bit where he kisses her in the library and it’s my favourite bit ever... because it’s really sweet and also really funny and it made me cry... oh, I just have to show you this, sorry, I know it’s a spoiler....

“Ginevra...” Tom stood up. “You’re being really childish...” he sang. Yes, he sang. He didn’t usual sing-song his words, but here was a chance.

“I am not the childish one here!” Ginevra said, spinning back.

Tom hadn’t realised how much closer he’d put himself to her until she turned, and his face was alarmingly close to hers, though of course several inches higher.

This time, when his breath stopped, he couldn’t make it start again. He could see every freckle on her pale face... he could count the delicate russet eyelashes... her eyebrows were furrowing in the most attractive scowl he’d ever seen... and beneath those, large, glowing hazel eyes, a swirl of green and brown and gold, drawing him in... she was beauty personified... she was still talking – probably ranting on at him stupidly... this realisation drew his attention to her lips... pink and vaguely heart-shaped... he was numbed by her closeness, and before he knew what he was doing, he bent his face to hers and pressed his lips to hers.

Time stopped.

There was just her and him, together, kissing, and-

KISSING?

His eyes snapped open and he dragged himself away, restraining the urge to yelp in fright. His heart was a violent salsa drum-beat inside his chest, and his throat had constricted. “Oh shit,” he gasped.

Ginevra was staring at him. A deer-in-headlights look was frozen on her face, hazel eyes wide. Even totally shocked, she was so beautiful that it was a fight for control that he didn’t just kiss her again.

“Oh God, I’m sorry,” he stammered. “I’m – I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Ginevra – Peregrine – I’m – God – oh – oh Merlin – sorry – I’m sorry-”

WHAT THE HELL DID I DO THAT FOR?

He shoved a hand roughly backwards through his tidy hair, not caring that he’d just mussed it after meticulously brushing it through, and then he whirled around and fled.

People had been watching!

The library! Madam Crofton, and – and – other students – and books – and bookcases – and Ginevra... oh shit almighty.

He didn’t know where he was going, except that he was walking away extremely fast, and that in one corridor he turned too soon, not realising that he hadn’t reached the corner yet, so that he walked face-first into a door.

This is from afterwards, when he’s by himself...

Tom practically ran into the common room. Fionn and her friends were in there – luckily they hadn’t seen it – but they saw him distraught, sprinting up the stairs to his bedroom and slamming the door so hard that the hinges rattled.

“Silencio,” he barked, flicking his wand at the door. Then he let out a raw yell of anger and kicked his wooden trunk as hard as he could. “DAMNIT!”

Stupid Ginevra! It was her fault. She'd made him look like a fool. He wasn't supposed to like anyone, even as friends! And now this! God, first the stupid beaver and then the stupid Imperius and now...

YOU kissed HER, reminded an unhelpful voice in the back of his head.

"SHUT UP," he snapped at it. "It was her fault! She was the one with the stupid doe-eyes! She was the one standing so close to me! She was the – she – she – it was her fault! All her fault! I just... I just... I just..."

Reacted badly? The voice supplied cheerfully.

"DAMNIT!" he roared, kicking and kicking his trunk until a massive dent appeared.

This wasn't fair! She didn't like him that way – she'd made that painfully, excruciatingly clear in the hallway, to Philips, a few weeks ago, before the Yule Ball – and he wasn't supposed to like her that way – it was practically illegal, this – so wrong – and yet, yet, there had never, ever before in seventeen years of his life that felt so incredibly right.

Her face floated in his head and his stomach lurched. His face heated up again, remembering the urge he'd had when she'd pouted... he might as well have... at least, then, it would have been less public than by the library doors, in front of everyone in the library and also in the hall outside...

Blood screamed through his head so fast that it was almost enough to make him keel over and pass out. His vision was swimming around, jumping around... he curled his hands into fists so tight that his fingernails drew blood...

You're right... it was stupid... you should kill her...

“SHUT UP!” he bellowed, spinning around and yelling at the ceiling, even though that wasn’t where the voice was coming from. “I DO NOT NEED YOU RIGHT NOW!”

HAHAHAHA. I LOVE THAT. Yeah, this is the Head common room, which I think is the funniest bit.

Before he could decide which was the best, she was moving towards him at a ridiculous speed – the panic was setting in – “Don’t you dare run away because I got just as embarrassed as you in the library-” – she was coming closer – “but I didn’t feel the need to hide from the rest of the world-” – closer – “and anyway this is going to be a hell of a lot more embarrassing and probably not going to work-”

Yes, but it’s different for you! he screamed inside his head. You’re brave!

“-so shut up and-“

You dare to do all of these things and don’t care! You’re brave and beautiful and amazing and I have no bloody idea but I’m starting to think that you’ve made me fall in love with you!

Then she was there – and oh God she was in his personal space – his eyes got wider – hazel eyes – scarlet hair – freckles – he could make shapes out of her freckles, that was how close she was – it was almost ridiculous, that his brain had shut down and that all he could think of was stupid things. She has so many freckles – oh look. There’s a triangle.

Slow motion set in so he almost watched, as if from above, her grab his shoulders, drag his head down towards her... stupidly, his head squirted out one last desperate personal space invasion! before she smashed her mouth into his.

He closed his eyes and universes imploded in darkness behind his eyelids. She was tangling her hands in his air and he was instinctively pulling her closer, even though to be honest she couldn’t get much closer – breathlessly pushing his lips back against hers – holding her – bliss – sheer freakin’ bliss personified into one person, turning bliss

into an activity – this kiss – he was never going to let go – his heart was going so fast that he couldn't distinguish separate beats -

And when she dragged herself away, it was much too soon for it to end, even though he thought that he was going to pass out from not breathing for so long...

He was probably still going to pass out, as he hadn't yet recalled what breathing was like and how exactly it worked.

It wasn't helped by still having her crushed against him, her fingers curled into his hair, her eyes so close to his eyes that he could only see hazel – green and gold and brown – she was so devastatingly beautiful that the only thing stopping him from kissing her again was the shock of it all – she kissed me... she kissed me... she kissed me... she kissed me...and he could feel his knees giving out... slowly... there they went...

Ginevra let go of him, and twisted her gaze away from him. "Er." Her voice was shaky. "Goodnight, Tom."

Stunned, he stared after her as she turned and left the common room. The portrait-hole clicked closed... he could hear her talking to Robin the Rich... something about being nosey... then her footsteps, fading... she was gone...

And then his knees buckled.

With a spectacular thud, he hit the floor, cracking his head on the side of the table.

"Ow."

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! I think that's absolutely brilliant! I was just like, well, people who get kissed by the person they love usually feels like they're going to collapse... what if he did collapse?

HAHAHHAHHA.

Review, people!

Chapter Seven: Grace's Opinion

Alden stopped in a corner and cast the Silencing Charm on the space around them so that they were in a little muted bubble. "Okay, Ginny, listen to me. I'm going to ask you a very serious question, and you're going to give me a very serious answer. Riddle killed Amaris Malkin, didn't he?"

"I know," Bernard murmured. He moved a step closer. "I like your hair, by the way..." with one finger, he pushed her crimson tresses behind her ear... travelled his hand down... balanced his finger under her slightly pointy chin... tilted her face up... WHOA. NOT GOING THERE. Ginny stepped back sharply upon realising what he was trying to do. Her heart was pounding in her chest as she stared up at him in horror. What was it with everyone making moves on her this year? "Get lost," she told him, and left before he could work his charms on her again.

xxx

Ginny sent the owl off through one of the many wide windows of the Owlery, watching it flap its fluffy grey wings. She considered buying an owl for herself, but decided that she could always do that later, if needed.

The letter she had written went as follows:

Tom,

How are you? I haven't heard from you since you Flooded into the Slytherin common room. Is everything alright? I don't have much else to say... me and Alden had a big fight, and we aren't really talking much anymore. Scott and this sixth-year called Bernard Terby had a big argument in front of me. Not much else is happening. You are still coming to the Hallowe'en barbeque, right?

Love, Ginny xxx

She'd asked Dippet if she was allowed to invite Tom to the barbeque, and he had quite happily agreed; he was always happy to see ex-

students and find out what they were up to. Also, Slughorn would be delighted to discover if Tom was becoming famous or not, so that he could boast 'I taught him' to anyone would listen.

Time was growing thinner for him to tell her if he was coming or not – she had to inform Dippet and Slughorn if he was, and if she didn't let them know in time, then they might not let him in, as he wouldn't have an invitation. She, personally, didn't see why they couldn't just Owl him an invitation whether or not he could come, but that wasn't the way that Headmaster Armando Dippet worked.

The owl became a speck on the horizon, and Ginny turned away from the window.

She trotted down the worn steps from the Owlery and was pushing through the door into the seventh-floor corridor, a level of the Hogwarts castle that used to be home to her but was now unfamiliar and strange, when she came face to face with Alden.

"Alden," she said offhandedly.

"Ginny, I'm not going to tell anyone," he said irritably. "You can stop treating me like I've got the plague. If anything, I should be ignoring you for slamming me against the wall and holding me hostage while threatening to blow my head off."

True, she thought to herself, though her pride wouldn't let her say it aloud.

"Sorry about that," she said stiffly.

"No, I don't really care. I don't blame you, either. I know that telling me that must have damn near killed you." He was right. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry for interrogating you and making you have to tell me."

"It's okay. You did what any person would."

For an awkward three-second pause, nothing happened, then they hugged each other, missing the other's friendship and wordlessly apologising for being such stubborn... Slytherins. Then they walked

together back to the Slytherin common room, chatting amiably about all the things that they hadn't been able to say for a week since they stopped being friends.

xxx

Ginevra,

Yes, I'm coming to the barbeque. Why did you and Philips fight? Why Terby and Reeve – I thought they were made of the same sort of material. Meaning arrogant, annoying woman-eaters. As for your initial question, I would have presumed that the answer was fairly obvious. No, I am not ruddy okay.

Tom

Ginny let out a small cry of frustration. It wasn't her fault! She was trying to help; trying to make him feel better! And all that he did was snap at her. It wasn't fair.

"What now?" asked Grace.

"Just... Tom's not being fair." She sighed. She wanted to talk to someone... and Grace, she supposed, would do. No, that was unfair to Grace. She would do perfectly. While she could speak to no-one about his problems, she could talk about the other non-supernatural-related aspects.

"Why not?"

Ginny silently passed over the letter.

Grace read it quickly and then handed it back. "Why did you and Alden fight? And what's this about Scott and... Terby? Isn't that the really hot new Quidditch Keeper?" she enquired.

"Me and Alden fought over... you know, the secret thing that I can't tell you about. He wanted to know what it was, and I wouldn't tell him what it was. We've made up now, though. Yes, Bernard Terby is the new Keeper-"

"The hot Keeper!" Grace giggled. She jumped up and moved closer to Ginny to talk more quietly.

The redhead rolled her eyes. "Yes, that one."

Grace gaped. "You admitted that he was hot!" she exclaimed, a bit too loudly. Avani stared at them from the other side of the common room.

"Ssh!" Ginny hissed. She sighed again. "Yes, okay? He is. I'm not denying it. Anyway, I was talking to him by the greenhouses, and then Scott came over. Scott told me earlier that he still liked me loads, and he looked really angry that I was talking to Bernard... probably because I was being really obvious that I thought he was good-looking. I was giggling and everything."

Grace chuckled. "I can just imagine this red-faced Ginny laughing hysterically while surrounded on both sides by attractive boys!"

"Pretty much, yeah," Ginny confessed. "Anyway, I think Scott was really jealous, and they had this big argument, and I thought it was just Scott being unreasonable because I was talking to guys except him, so I took him away and talked to him-"

"About what?"

"About me not liking him that way, and how I was sorry if I'd made him think that I did-"

"What did you say?"

Ginny frowned. "You ask too many questions."

"Please?"

"Fine. Well, I just said that I was still dating Tom, and I didn't think that we were going to call it off anytime soon, so he wasn't to get his hopes up too high." Ginny shrugged.

Grace winced. "Ouch. Poor Scottie. Poor, broken-hearted, attractive Scottie," she murmured.

Ginny raised one russet eyebrow. "He wasn't 'poor Scottie' last year, when he was hitting on you at the Yule Ball preparations," she pointed out.

"He's sort of changed since then."

She was right. Ginny mused how he didn't seem as much of a saucy now, always flirting with people and getting girlfriends. He'd had two girlfriends in the first week on school, but since then he'd calmed down and hadn't had any. In two months. It was weird.

"Anyway," said Grace. "Back at Hogwarts, present-day..."

"Oh yeah, right. Um, anyway, and so I thought that Scott was just being unreasonably jealous because I was talking to Bernard, but I have a very strong suspicion that Bernard likes me too, because I was talking to him in the hallway, and he was really jealous of Scott... and then he tried to kiss me."

"Whoa!" Grace fell out of her chair with a loud thump as she landed on the stone floor. "Seriously?"

She nodded. "Mm-hm. I just told him to get lost. Anyway, Tom's been having some troubles lately, and I've been trying to help him, but now in that letter he's being really... ehh." She waved her hands, not having a word for how he was behaving. "And all I've done is try to help him and ask if he was alright."

Grace frowned. "Ginny, you're going to hate me saying this, but don't you think that maybe... maybe, you know, you've stretched your relationship as far as it can go... like a rubber band... and maybe the rubber's about to snap?"

Ginny's frown deepened. "What are you suggesting?" she said warily.

"Well, I dunno. I went out with Alden for a month before it snapped for us. And you've done, what, ten months?" Grace guessed.

“Nine and a half, actually,” said Ginny absently, thinking back to that bizarre, strange day when he’d finally asked her out, in one of the most peculiar ways imaginable.

“I was almost right,” Grace said. “Don’t you just think that maybe it’s time you took a break?”

Ginny moved back into reality from her daydreams and considered it. Considered breaking up with him. Considered not having any more reason to write to him. Considered never seeing him again. Heartburn rose in her throat. She felt sick.

“No, I don’t,” she retorted, “thank you very much.” She was starting to regret beginning this conversation with Grace.

The brunette shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

The topic of their chatter moved onto something else, but Ginny couldn’t focus. Her mind was worried by the memory of Tom’s snappy letter-reply – frightened by the knowledge that what if Grace was right?

xxx

“Happy birthday!”

Ginny grinned as she sat in the Slytherin common room, having just come back from her last lesson of the day – Herbology – and waiting for the getting-ready to start for the barbeque.

From Scott, she’d been given a bouquet of white lilies and a pearl bracelet. These gifts made her feel very guilty. She got rid of the flowers, as she felt that they were much too romantic, but kept the bracelet, as other people had given her jewellery before, and that didn’t mean that any of them had fancied her.

From Bernard, she’d received roses, which she set on fire anyway, because she was allergic to rose petals. He hadn’t thought to give her anything else except a box of chocolates, which she shared with

everyone, simply because chocolate was what happiness tasted like, and she wasn't going to get rid of them in a hurry.

Grace had given her some new green eyeliner and a dark-green swing skirt, which she had decided she would wear to the barbeque, as they worked beautifully worn together, and they suit her wonderfully. Alden had given her two new Wizarding fiction books. She loved the books that he always gave her, though she always knew what would happen, as Grace usually stole them and read them before she did, and spoiled the plot by telling her what happened. Ginny didn't mind that much. She hated suspense.

Given by Flora were black boots that she had also decided to wear to the barbeque, as they had slight heels and though Ginny knew that she was probably going to break both of her legs, it made her a good inch and a half taller. Eleanor Fionn, last year's Head Girl, and also a good friend of Ginny's, had posted her a purple hairband that had arrived a day early. However, Ginny wasn't going to wear it to the barbeque as it didn't really match everything else that she'd planned to wear, and, while she didn't usually care about colour-coordination, she was going to see Tom for the first time in two months, and for once she was determined to even vaguely match.

Cramming the last chocolate into her mouth, Ginny announced, "Well, that's the chocolate gone, so I'm going to go and get ready."

"Me, too," chirped Grace.

"Coming," said Flora.

The three set off down the winding stairs towards the seventh-year girls' dormitory and prepared for the big night.

A good hour-and-a-half later, during which time all three had time to shower, get dressed, apply make-up, wipe it off, change their clothes, apply new make-up, wipe it off, stand around in their underwear wailing that they had nothing to wear, get back into what they'd originally changed into, and put their make-up on again, Flora, Grace and Ginny were ready to rock and roll.

Ginny was mostly wearing her birthday presents – her dark-green swing-skirt from Grace, the black boots from Flora, the white bracelet from Scott – and then some of her own clothes, a white long-and-puffy-sleeved shirt with a black shawl pinned together over it. She'd brushed her hair for once, and outlined her eyes in both grey and green. She had chosen not to wear a mask, and instead had strapped feathery wings to the back of her shawl.

Flora was the girliest and was wearing a dress. It was made of a soft, shiny white material, and a wide pink ribbon separated the corset from the poofy skirt. Atop her fluffy blonde hair, teased into curls, was a simple tiara. Grace wore a long, black pleated skirt with a blue blouse and a matching blue hat. As a joke, she wore a Muggle Hallowe'en costume-shop witches hat on her head.

"I think we're ready to go," said Grace.

Ginny merely 'mm'ed in response. The pointy high-heeled boots were already hurting her feet, despite how much taller they made her. She was now the same height as Flora and Alden. Plus, she was absolutely sick with nerves about seeing Tom again. She couldn't help fidgeting with the pearl bracelet she wore. It felt sick and wrong to wear Scott's present when she was going to see her boyfriend.

"Are you alright?" asked Grace kindly, looking at the worried Ginny.

"Yeah," she mumbled. "Just nervous."

"Don't worry, it'll be fun," said Flora cheerily. "Gulistan's coming, and I'm going to ask him to dance."

Grace flashed Ginny a look. She knew the real reason why Ginny was anxious, and showed her sympathy in her blue eyes. The redhead grinned gratefully in return.

"Are we rolling?" Flora asked, looking around.

"Yeah. Let's go."

Grace and Flora hurried up the stone steps, eager for the fun to begin.

Ginny stayed behind. She stood, stock-still in the centre of the room, staring at her reflection. She looked good; she wasn't worried about that. She was just worried about what Grace had said about rubber snapping. She combed three fingers through her hair, letting it bounce into slight waves-

"Are you coming, Ginny?"

"Yeah, hang on, sorry." She shook out her hair and followed them up the stairs.

xxx

A/N: YAYY! TOM IS DOWN THOSE STAIRS! :D Review, please! And if you haven't seen Backtrack yet, then go and see it! You'll like it...

Next Time:

"Um, Scott, I think I need to let you know that-

"Riddle's here," said Scott incredulously.

"-Tom is coming..." she finished lamely.

She scanned the crowd for Tom's tall, lean, dark-haired figure that she could recognise anywhere. However, she didn't need to look for him at all – glancing across the make-shift dance-floor, the only thing that she had to look for was dark, not-quite-black eyes, as those were what Ginny's gaze locked onto.

Xxx

Chapter Eight: Swallow, Step Up, Pirouette

Then Alden and Ginny walked together back to the Slytherin common room, chatting amiably about all the things that they hadn't been able to say for a week since they stopped being friends.

Grace frowned. "Ginny, you're going to hate me saying this, but don't you think that maybe... maybe, you know, you've stretched your relationship as far as it can go... like a rubber band... and maybe the rubber's about to snap?"

Ginny stayed behind. She stood, stock-still in the centre of the room, staring at her reflection. She looked good; she wasn't worried about that. She was just worried about what Grace had said about rubber snapping. She shook out her hair and followed them up the stairs.

xxx

"You look great!"

"Happy birthday!"

"I love your hair!"

Ginny grinned around at various unknowns, accepting compliments from friends. It made the bubbling nervousness in her stomach quell slightly, but it didn't stop it altogether.

I can't believe I'm eighteen!

She swung her shoes by her hip – she'd taken them off almost as soon as she arrived, so painful had walking in them become.

"D'you want a birthday drink?" Scott appeared beside her. "You look great."

"Thanks; I'd love one." Ginny beamed at him. "You look good, too."

His ears coloured slightly pink and the redhead wondered if she'd gone too far, recalling their conversation on the stairs. However, he moved away and returned a moment later with glasses of punch.

The Hogwarts grounds set aside for the barbeque looked fantastic. The grass had been clipped extremely short so that people could walk across it in high-heels and not get stuck, something that Ginny, in heeled boots, had been immensely grateful for. Plastic skeletons and fabric ghosts hung from trees and bushes, and even the teacher chaperones supervising were dressed up. The Professors had taken their costumes slightly more seriously than their students, and they looked quite funny.

"Look at Professor Slughorn in the slug suit' is a great icebreaker, isn't it?" Scott commented with a smile, following her gaze.

Ginny laughed. "Yeah, I suppose it is. Anyway uncomfortable silences and – BAM! Bring in the teacher's-costume comments to save the day." She shook her head, thinking of awkward pauses soon to come.

She remembered what she'd told Scott about her being in love with Tom – the unlikeliest person she could have told – and realised that she should probably tell him that Tom was coming in person.

"Um, Scott, I think I need to let you know that-"

"Riddle's here," said Scott incredulously.

"-Tom is coming..." she finished lamely. "Yeah, okay, I guess you worked that out already."

"Why is he here?" Scott's voice had a petulant tone to it.

"Because I invited him," Ginny said sharply, not liking his sourness. She could invite her boyfriend to a barbeque if she wanted; why should Scott's opinion matter?

She scanned the crowd for Tom's tall, lean, dark-haired figure that she could recognise anywhere. However, she didn't need to look for

him at all – glancing across the make-shift dance-floor, the only thing that she had to look for was dark, not-quite-black eyes, as those were what Ginny's gaze locked onto.

A smile spread on her lips and she hurried forwards, tossing her shoes under the buffet table to keep them safe.

She could see him very well now, at the edge of the barbeque, looking down with disdain at the younger students who dared to stare, his expression of I can be here if I want thank you very much now get lost frightening people around him. His wavy hair was brushed neatly in a side-parting, as always; he wore no costume, just plain black trousers and a grey time-period sleeveless jumper over a black shirt.

She had, originally, intended to rush up and hug him, but that didn't quite work, as when she was about a metre away, her foot got stuck in a pothole of mud and she promptly fell over in front of him.

Just before she hit the ground, long arms curled around her thin frame, thankfully preventing her from hitting the mud face-first, and instead all that happened was she got the hem of her brand-new skirt dirty.

Ginny tilted her head sideways and saw Tom's face a few inches from hers as he held her in mid-air. The briefest of smiles flickering onto his lips, he straightened up, taking her with him, so that her feet landed back on solid ground, placing her in her favourite place – in the closest proximity to him possible.

"Hey," she said, smiling. "Sorry about that."

"Your hair." He frowned slightly. "Where's it all gone?"

She rolled her eyes. "I cut it, silly." Then she remembered why she'd been so nervous, and every butterfly roaming every flower migrated to her stomach. "Does it look okay?"

"No, it looks..." he stopped his sentence, and Ginny knew that he was painfully aware of everyone else in the school watching the 'murder couple' with interest. He didn't like admitting his feelings in private, let

alone in front of a thousand people. He lowered her voice until even she could barely hear him: "you look beautiful."

Ginny could feel that among the people watching were Scott and Bernard. The thought made her very uncomfortable.

Now unable to restrain himself any longer, Tom glanced sideways at the crowds of people watching them. The majority of them coughed their excuses and looked out, shuffling around and doing their own thing. Tom curled his fingers through Ginny's, barely moving an inch to reach her hands, and then lead her away from the dance-floor.

As they left, Ginny saw Scott watching them with an expression on his face like he was contemplating suicide. She pretended that she hadn't seen him.

They stopped about ten metres from the barbeque, far enough so that they wouldn't be bothered, but not too far away.

"Happy birthday," Tom said awkwardly. He reached into one of his pockets and pulled out a small box. For a few seconds, he looked embarrassed, fiddling with the dark green ribbon on the silver box (Slytherin colours. How typical, she thought), and then extended it towards her.

"You didn't have to get me anything," Ginny said, though she was extremely pleased that he had and probably would have been upset if he hadn't. "I suppose it is a change from last year's birthday treat – being called ugly and slapping you around the face," she teased.

Pink smudged high on his cheekbones. "That hurt," he told her. "Still, I didn't mean it."

"You wish that you hadn't meant it, but at the time, you did," Ginny corrected. "I don't blame you, really. I was an annoying little cow."

"I'll admit, you were irritating," Tom smiled, "but I'll have you know that I thought you were beautiful from about Day One."

Ginny turned bright red. "Well."

"Now that was what I found annoying. There I was, trying to disappear, and then for some reason I couldn't live without you, despite how I hated you," Tom admitted. "Then I wondered how much I actually hated you, after all."

Her heart skipped a couple of beats. Now she felt bad. There she'd been, plotting ways to kill him, and he'd been beating himself up because he found the girl he despised beautiful. She couldn't help but feel a little out of balance.

"Okay, then, confession time for me, too," she told him with an embarrassed smile. "While you were daydreaming about this infuriatingly pretty girl, I was thinking of ways to murder you without anyone else noticing."

"You found the perfect way," he murmured.

She frowned. "Did I?" She didn't remember this.

"...You left."

Guilt bubbled inside her. "I'm sorry." Those words didn't seem adequate. She knew how broken he'd been when she left – it had almost turned him into Lord Voldemort.

"It's alright. Anyway, don't you want to know what your present is?" Tom asked anxiously, prodding the silver box with one long finger.

Ginny pulled the ribbon off and then opened the little box. Her breath caught. "Oh." Inside was a necklace of silver chain; nestled in soft fabric was a pendant made of some green-brown-gold-swirled rock.

"It's nephrite," explained Tom. "I thought that it would match your eyes." He plucked the necklace from the box, unclasped it, and then held out each end, as if to say May I?

As she turned her back to him so that he could fasten the necklace around her throat, she thought of her own wide, hazel eyes. "My eyes

aren't that pretty," she said, mostly to herself. She hadn't meant for Tom to hear.

"Yes, they are." She didn't think that he'd meant for her to hear that. A moment later: "There."

His hands lingered a moment beside her throat before he let go of the necklace, and a shiver passed down her spine that had nothing to do with the cooling October night air.

"Thank you," she whispered, not turning back to look back at him. She didn't want him to see how hopelessly lost she was to him; she knew that it would show in her eyes.

"Shall we dance?" asked Tom's voice from behind her.

"I can't dance, you know that," Ginny reminded him.

"Humour me."

She swallowed. Step up to the moment.

She gave in, and allowed herself to be lead back onto the dance-floor, though they remained near the edges. It was a medium-paced song; quite fast. But things seemed to move more slowly than usual – it might as well have been a waltz.

Her fingers linked through his and together they spun. He spun her out, spun her back into his arms, pirouetted her around him, her angel-wings brushing against him – then the music plunged and his hands swept down to her waist, took hold, she saw the glow on his cheeks that showed his nervousness as plainly as she hid hers, then he was lifting her into the air, almost weightless, into the stars, flying with her wings, forever leaning against his left shoulder-

Then she came down, landed on her bare feet, stumbled (balance was not her thing), was caught, and then continued this glorious jive that she never wanted to end.

Even Tom seemed to have forgotten that they were in public – they were in their own little world – no-one else was watching – no-one else mattered. He bent his face down, his long nose touching hers, while their feet danced back and forth, almost jinxed, having a life of their own...

His eyes were holding hers captive, dark and deep and dangerous... his face was so close to hers... the smell of ink and sandalwood... blood pounding through her veins... her eyes fluttered closed... tilted her face up to his...

“Hey.”

Ginny jumped about a foot in the air, jerking back into reality. Tom straightened up, startled.

Standing a metre away was Scott Reeve, looking slightly annoyed, but smiling, looking only at Ginny.

“Can I have this dance?”

Fury flared inside her. Stupid, stupid Scott! He always had to spoil everything!

And, just to make everything better, the jive drew to a close and a slow song struck up.

Her eyes narrowed to hazel slits, glaring at Scott. “Fine,” she snapped, and stormed past him. She didn’t say goodbye to Tom – all that she was going to do was give Scott a good telling-off and then come back.

“Right.” She set her hands on her hips and glared. “What is your problem?”

“He gave you that necklace, didn’t he?” Scott said softly, staring at the swirly pendant lying against her collar-bone. “Paired with my bracelet... conflicting feelings?”

“No,” Ginny snapped, and, to prove it, she tugged off the pearls and threw it at him. “Why the hell did you get me over here? This had better be freakin’ important.”

“I wanted to dance with you,” Scott replied simply, but he was smirking, and Ginny wanted to slap his smug little face.

“You could have waited five minutes!”

“No, because then you would have kissed Riddle.”

AAAARGH! She reached up and slapped him. “Stop it! You stupid, jealous retard!”

“That’s me.” He seemed strangely proud of this. “Dance?” He held out his arms.

“No! Scott, I was trying to be nice to you about this, but you have pushed me to breaking point!” Ginny hissed furiously. “I – do – not – like – you! In fact, right now, I just about hate you! I am this close to strangling you! What is your problem?”

“I think I’m in love with you,” Scott told her.

She stared at him. Huh? He stared back at her, eyebrows raised, waiting for her to make some sort of comment in return. He looked as though he didn’t care, but she could tell from the ruddy cheeks that he did.

“No, you don’t,” she said. “You don’t, Scott. You’re in love with Ishbel, or Rosalind, or – or – whoever you last went out with, okay?”

“This last girlfriend – she didn’t exist. The one I was ‘breaking up’ when we met in the Owlery? My cousin. I was hoping to make you jealous, but you didn’t care, so instead of dating loads of girls until you got – I dunno, taken over by a jealous rage and snogged me or something, instead I just let you know that I liked you and tried to win you over... and it’s obviously not working, so I just thought I’d say – I think I love you.”

“ARRRGH!” This time she actually spoke the angry caveman growl. “No! Bad Scott! Bad, bad, bad!”

He loves you. You don’t love him. Meanwhile, you love someone who loves you back-

So, with Bill and Fleur’s marriage-sealing kiss, the party began. The music blared, and the dancing started. Ginny searched the crowd for Harry, and, as a professional with five years of Harry-crowd-searching, found him immediately. He looked incredible...

... and he was looking at her. “You look beautiful!” he yelled across the crowd to her. “I love you!”

Her eyes stung with tears. Her only dream. She was Harry’s love. Harry, the famous Harry Potter, loved her. “Harry,” she breathed, and started to move towards him when a yellow blur ran past her.

Ginny didn’t acknowledge the yellow blur until she saw where it was going, and what it was... or rather, who. Luna, clad in a fabulous yellow gown, running to Harry – throwing her skinny arms around his neck – kissing him heatedly – “I love you, too” – pain.

NO! STOP IT! I WILL NOT PITY HIM!

“Scott, I’m sorry – but – but I can’t. This... it just doesn’t work. Okay? I love Tom, he loves me, and you don’t fit into that equation!” Ginny said desperately. “Please, just... don’t make me feel any worse.”

Spontaneously, and to Ginny’s utmost horror, Scott stepped forwards and pressed his lips to hers.

She twisted away backwards and whacked him around the face. “Scott!”

He had a dazed look in his eyes. It might have been the kiss... or she might have given him a concussion. She hoped it was the latter, and that he would get amnesia, and forget who she was.

“Ginny, I-”

“Listen, Scott,” she growled. “My high-heels boots are about two metres away under that buffet table, and if you don’t leave me and Tom the hell alone, then I will hit you with them, repeatedly, every waking moment, until you agree that you don’t love me anymore!”

Her voice had become a shout, and everyone on the dance-floor was staring. Including Tom.

“Oh, Merlin,” she muttered. She stalked back to Tom. “Let’s get some food,” she pleaded, and dragged him to the buffet table.

She selected sausages and beef-burgers and chips and bacon and peppers and kebabs and more sausages and more chips and a dollop of ketchup and another glass of punch and more chips and more ketchup and maybe another piece of bacon, followed by some ice-cream-

“Do you think you’ll be able to survive the night on that pitiful quantity of food?” Tom asked sarcastically from behind her.

“I’m hungry,” she said defensively, having already crammed a sausage into her mouth.

“I can see that,” Tom replied. Despite his teasing words, his face was flat. She wondered what was going through his head.

Selecting a table where Flora and Gulistan already sat (and getting on like a house on fire, she thought, pleased), Ginny sat down, and looked up expectantly for Tom to join her.

He sat opposite her. Compared the mountain on her own plate, he looked as if he was on a diet. He picked up a fork and poked a piece of bacon. “So Reeve’s in love with you, is he?” he asked quietly.

Ginny’s heart sank. Oh dear. He wasn’t supposed to work that out.

Flora looked very interested in their conversation; Ginny glared at her. The blonde crept back to her own side of the table and continued to

chat with Gulistan, while lovingly admiring his hair... (she did that a lot).

"No," Ginny replied firmly. "No, he's not."

"I thought that I heard you say-"

"You didn't."

"I'm fairly sure he is."

"Well, then, I'm going to have to hex him until he changes his mind," said Ginny. "And that's final."

He didn't look consoled, and the rest of the meal was spent on conversations of trivial things, like homework and teachers and Flourish and Blott's. Ginny wished that they could talk about more important things, but there were too many people – Grace and Alden had now joined them. Grace was with one of the guests, a teacher's son, Edouard Devin; Alden was accompanied by Philippa Decrow, an intelligent and pretty Ravenclaw who Ginny knew from her Charms class.

"Wouldn't it be funny if Alden and Pippa got married?" Grace leaned over to whisper. "Then she'd be Philippa Philips!" She hooted with laughter, and Ginny grinned in response, though it wasn't that funny.

"A dance, madam?"

Ginny turned and looked over one shoulder to see an incredible-looking Bernard Terby. He was wearing red, with devil-horns perched atop his silky brown hair.

"No." She turned back to Tom.

"Don't deny me any longer, my darlin'," Bernard breathed in her ear.

Tom was staring. Ginny had the horrible feeling that he could hear what Bernard was saying.

The redhead turned in her stool. "Terby, get lost. I don't like you and I don't like Scott. I don't want to dance with either of you. Now move your arrogant arse away from my personal bubble before I kick it away," she said fiercely.

"Ooh, feisty," Bernard said coolly before he left.

"Is he in love with you, too?" asked Tom dully.

"No. Let's dance." She stood up and motioned for him to do the same. He followed her onto the dance-floor, as far away from the eating tables as possible, where most people were. Still, there were enough couples dancing that they didn't look stupid, dancing alone.

A slow song.

As the first few bars struck up softly, Ginny recognised it as a song that Grace sometimes listened to. She slightly changed her grip on Tom's hand, and moved her other hand to the back of his neck; he set his free hand on the small of her back, going slightly pink again.

And then they danced.

Slowly twirling in circles, around and around, pressed close to him, looking up into the face that she never wanted to leave behind again... but there was a sword, a flame, a disease in her stomach, right between them-

"Alden knows," she blurted out.

Tom stopped dancing. He stared at her.

"I didn't tell him," she said. "He worked it out. I mean, it was kind of obvious-"

BAD! Not the right thing to say, oh Merlin...

"How... obvious?" His words were sharp, cold, distanced.

“No, I didn’t mean that. It’s just that Alden’s really smart, and I was jumpy about everything. Like, I kept dropping things whenever someone mentioned you. He guessed. I tried to deny it, but he was so stubborn. Then I attacked him and swore that I’d kill him if he told anyone. Remember how I told you that I fought with him? That’s why.”

Her words were jumbling together as desperation sank through her brain.

Still Tom looked at her in silence.

“He doesn’t know everything – he doesn’t know about you – he just knows about you and Amaris Malkin – and that you don’t do it intentionally – and – and please say something, Tom,” she pleaded, panicking.

Oh God. This was it. It was all over.

She couldn’t lose him!

“... It’s – it’s fine,” Tom forced out, tearing his eyes from hers.

“No, it’s not – I’m so sorry,” Ginny whispered.

“I told you, it’s fine.” He let go of her to push a hand roughly backwards through his hair, upsetting dark waves and spilling them sideways. With his other hand, he still held onto Ginny’s other hand.

“Come on; I don’t think that either of us feel like dancing anymore.” She tugged on his hand to pull him from the dancefloor, letting her second hand fall away from his neck, but Tom shook his head.

“I’m okay. Let’s dance.” With one hand, he spun her under his arm so that she finished with her back to him, his arm crossed over her stomach. It was a thing of beauty how perfectly she fitted in his arms. “Besides, if we stop dancing, then we’ll just have to sit down and make small-talk,” he pointed out.

Ginny grimaced. "Well... we could always go for a walk across the grounds..."

"Hm... we could... but I don't think that your friends would appreciate me kidnapping you."

"Kidnap me? With what intentions?"

He smiled by her ear, his voice just a murmur. "Only the worst."

The little smile on her lips matched his as he twirled her back to face the right way and pirouetted her the length of his arm-

And she promptly fell over.

This time, she did hit the ground, but wasn't hurt. Instead she just sat there in a heap, laughing her head off until tears were in her eyes. "I told you that I couldn't dance!"

Tom looked down at her in amusement. "Perhaps you should take a break," he teased.

She held out her arms for him to help her up. Easily, he pulled her back onto her feet and slipped his arm loosely around her waist and walked her back to the tables. "We can withstand the small-talk," she said lightly. "Torture is survivable."

xxx

Alden and Penelope Dann's speech drew to a close, and applause rang out. Then the Prefects began to clear up, and the other students began to make their way back towards the castle.

"Well, I'll say goodbye now, I suppose," Tom said, turning to Ginny.

"I'll walk you to the edge of the grounds so that you can Apparate."

"No." He shook his head. "I'll walk you to the Entrance Hall, so that you can skip away with your friends, and I can go off without having

to spend the next forty-eight hours worrying that you were kidnapped somewhere between the Hogwarts gates and your dormitory.”

“Forty-eight hours?” she echoed in confusion as she fetched her shoes and headed towards the castle with him.

“The time it would – at best – take for me to send you a letter, and then for you to reply, thus confirming your safety,” Tom explained. “Also, can I ask why you chose not to wear your shoes?”

“They’re brand-new; Flora got them for me.” She held them up, letting him see the pointy toes and high-heels. “They’re just about the most painful thing I’ve ever had curse my clothing itinerary.” Shifting her boots to one hand, she curled her fingers through his and changed the subject. “So did you have fun tonight, against all odds?”

“Fun?” He raised one eyebrow. “I’m not quite sure. A few moments were priceless, though others I’d have gladly missed out on,” he mused.

“Such as?”

“Hm... I enjoyed watching you hit Reeve around the face, for one thing...” Tom said thoughtfully, smirking when she blushed.

“I liked that, too,” she grinned, face glowing pink. “Nothing can satisfy a person quite like slapping someone else.”

They stopped in front of the steps up to the Entrance Hall doors, lurking in the shadows so that no-one would intrude on their farewells.

“This is where I leave you,” Tom said, sounding quite reluctant. “I only realise now that I haven’t really talked to you. I think that there were too many people... but what can be said out loud can be easily said in a letter, of course.”

“Can’t I smuggle you into the castle somewhere and hide you?” Ginny asked sweetly.

"I'm afraid that would probably come under the 'intruder' category," Tom smiled slightly. "Happy birthday, Ginevra." Still cradling her hand in his own, he bent his head down and kissed her, gently, so that it wouldn't progress in public, where they'd probably be mocked (someone always brought rotten tomatoes from big parties to throw at people), but insistently enough so that her lips tingled and she lost all train of rational thought.

I love you.

She wanted to hold onto him so that he could never leave, but she didn't dare, as that would probably lead to having tomatoes thrown at her. She settled for this, but was unhappy when the kiss had to end, and then he looked down at her.

And she saw love in his eyes.

"Inside. Now." He said it sternly, but his eyes were smiling quietly as he pushed her up the steps. "I'll see you soon." Their gazes held for only a split-second before he turned and walked away into the darkness.

Ginny stayed standing on the middle step, watching his retreating back. Her fingers found the nephrite pendant around her throat and her heart sang.

xxx

A/N: YAY. More Tomness coming up soon, though not in the way that you'd like. Eliseyweesey, does this chapter answer your question? Yup, I'm afraid to say that I am "throwing a Jacob in", so to speak. :D

Another rant. Here it comes.

ARGH! STEPHANIE MEYER IS STEALING MY IDEAS! Well not really. BUT STILL! I just got Breaking Dawn, and I haven't finished it yet, and yes, it's AMAZING, BUT IT'S GONE AND PIKED MY PLANS FOR FAST FORWARD! Gahhhhh! And now when I post up the rest of Press Play and Fast Forward, people are going to be like, "Urrr, you're copying Twilight", and I'm just like, "ER, NO! Because I came

up with these ideas before I even read the first Twilight book!
ABADSFGSDAFSDKAJFJ! FHDSFSAJHDHSK! SAFHDSKFASAK!
...If you've read Breaking Dawn then I've just given you a massive
spoiler. Sorry. Hate to destroy all suspense, but there you go.

Next Time:

The cut-grass dance-floor was filling up with chattering friends and shy couples... and a lot of suspicious people frowning at him. He didn't care about them, though. He was here for her, and speaking of her... where the hell was she?

There.

Ginevra.

His breath didn't quite make it out of his mouth. It got stuck somewhere in his windpipe, just near the top of his lungs.

Xxx

Chapter Nine: Meet, Collide, Crash, Burn

Ginny stayed standing on the middle step, watching his retreating back. Her fingers found the nephrite pendant around her throat and her heart sang.

xxx

Everyone is going to stare at me and hate me. Honestly, I don't blame them.

Tom took a deep breath, moved a hand to his head for a second to check that his hair hadn't mysteriously changed into some diabolically messy style in the ten seconds since he'd last checked it. Then he took a deep breath and Apparated.

He appeared by the Hogwarts gates. It was a short walk to where the barbeque was being hosted, but he didn't mind walking. It was so strange to be back here now that he had graduated. It felt bizarre. Other people arriving were looking at him as though to say what the hell are you doing here? His previous paranoia sunk back in, but he ignored it.

He was quite early, but then again, so was everyone else. He found his usual place in parties – near the edge, basically – and stood there to wait.

The cut-grass dance-floor was filling up with chattering friends and shy couples... and a lot of suspicious people frowning at him. He didn't care about them, though. He was here for her, and speaking of her... where the hell was she?

There.

Ginevra.

His breath didn't quite make it out of his mouth. It got stuck somewhere in his windpipe, just near the top of his lungs.

She wasn't so far away that he couldn't determine that it was definitely her, but she was quite some distance. She wore a green skirt that swung out in the style that many females sported, stopping a couple of inches below her knees. At the end of her revealed, pale lower legs were bare feet. Her shirt was white with large sleeves, and on top of that was a black shawl, attached to which were large black wings. Her hair had been cut short, waving slightly down to her chin, stark scarlet. Her freckles stood out on her pale skin in the early moonlight. Around her eyes, green and grey.

Her eyes. Green and brown and gold and emerald. Tom couldn't see them from here, but he'd memorised the colour. His fingers found the silver box in his pocket, fiddling with the ribbon. The perfect colour.

He'd memorised everything about her. The way that she stood – correctly remembered. The way that she smiled – correct. The way she was so inhumanly beautiful that it made his heart hurt – incorrect. He could never have remembered that, because in his memory was this fake person, only a memory.

And she was real.

Real, and amazing, and so... alive. A star on a dark night. A solo candle in a black-out. A sun in a storm. A flower in a graveyard. A single rose on a dead hedge of thorns. The love of his life.

She was leaning on a buffet table, talking happily to Reeve. His eyes flickered once more to the wings on her back. Of course. Hallowe'en. He'd forgotten his own mask. It didn't matter. He could be the monster – he already was.

And she, he mused, looking at the wings again, could be the angel that saved him.

Reeve was looking at him. He looked less than happy. In fact, he looked damn near furious. He was saying something to Ginevra. Her response was angry, annoyed...

She was looking for him.

It was almost amusing, in a strange way, to watch her forest-coloured eyes dance across every face, waiting for them to find his – and then their gazes met, collided, crashed, burned.

Those lips turned into a smile, and she tossed something under a table – were those her shoes? Why weren't they on her feet? – and moved quickly towards him.

His heart was going faster and faster and faster and faster –

She was coming faster and faster and faster and faster –

And then she fell.

Alarm fired through his system before lightning reflexes kicked in, and he moved forwards, bent. She landed gracelessly in his arms, her feet not quite touching the ground, just her toes, and then it hit him.

She was in his arms. He could catch the scent of apples and lavender water. He could feel her heartbeat. Her shortened dark auburn hair was tickling against his left cheek and chin. He could hear her breath as she recovered from the surprise of not quite toppling over. His head started to spin.

She turned her head towards him and their eyes met. Finally seeing emerald and chocolate and jade, spiderwebbed with gold, rimmed with grey, he couldn't help but smile. This was why he loved her. Without much effort (she was light), he stood up straight, putting her back down onto the grass – and found her within about an eighth of an inch of him.

"Hey." Ginevra smiled, that awkward smile, like partly biting her lip at the same time, like oh dear that was embarrassing. "Sorry about that."

"Your hair. Where's it all gone?" He frowned. Obviously he knew where it had gone, but he was curious as to why.

"I cut it, silly." Her eyes rolled expressively. Then her face changed to an expression of anxiety. Tom wondered why. "Does it look okay?"

You fool. It doesn't look okay. It looks so much more than okay.

"No, it looks..."

It was then that Tom suddenly remembered that they weren't alone. Roughly a thousand people were in the vicinity, and, for some strange reason, he could feel that they were almost all staring at him and Ginevra. He didn't know why. He'd ask her about that later.

He swallowed. He spoke more quietly, so that no-one else could hear. "You look beautiful," he confessed, though the word didn't do her justice. The word 'beautiful' came from meaning 'someone who held beauty'. Ginevra didn't hold beauty. She held the world. The universe was on fire in her eyes.

Feeling that the stares of everyone else were going to kill him unless he got rid of them, Tom looked around at everyone else. They all immediately looked away. Looking back to Ginevra, he took her hand, loosely lacing his fingers with hers, and moved her away from the prying gazes of nosy Hogwarts students.

Here we go.

Tom took a deep breath. "Happy birthday." The words sounded awkward and fake. They didn't sound right. There was no changing it now, though. He fished from one of his pockets the gift he'd got her.

It was inexpensive, and now he really didn't want to give it to her. However, it was too late, because she'd already seen it, and it would be stupid just not to let go of the box when she tried to take it. Even the ribbon looked ridiculous. He should have taken the ribbon off. He wasn't doing very well today. Mr. Flourish had berated him for putting the wrong books in the wrong place, and only now was he realising how awful his present for Ginevra was.

Too late now to change anything.

He held it out for her to take.

“You didn’t have to get me anything...” Ginevra said, taking it. However, happiness and curiosity was showing in her eyes; a pink flush of anticipation. “I suppose it is a change from last year’s birthday treat – being called ugly and slapping you around the face.” She grinned at him.

Oh Merlin. Does she remember that?

“And, I may add, I am a vampire,” she told him angrily. She pulled a pair of plastic vampire-fangs from her dungarees pocket and pushed them into her mouth. Then she snapped at him, teeth clinking.

“They’re not that childish,” he retorted coldly. He’d had it with her. How immature she was. How intelligent she was. How annoying she was. How he couldn’t bear the thought of her having another screaming attack, whatever chilled her fear to the point of passing out.

“If I was a vampire, that would have been a compliment, you realise. Try better insults.”

“The term, Peregrine, is vampress – and you are not one. Vampressi are famed for charm, wit, power, and extraordinary beauty,” Tom said, his voice glacial, never to warm up for her. How was that for a better insult? The last part wasn’t true – not the least – but she didn’t need to know that.

Her eyes widened, expanding the surface of hazel, drawing him in, making his head hurt. “You bastard,” she gasped, her voice strangled with pain. He got the feeling that his words had made much more impact on her than they intended, for reasons he did not know.

And then she slapped him.

Tom’s cheeks surged with heat. He hoped desperately that he wasn’t colouring; that would be humiliating beyond all human measures. “That hurt. Still, I didn’t mean it.”

Not strictly true, but...

“You wish that you hadn’t meant it, but at the time, you did.” How did she see through him like glass, like crystal? He thought he was stronger than that. “I don’t blame you, really. I was an annoying little cow.”

Yes, you were.

“I’ll admit, you were irritating,” That was an understatement. Tom smiled to think of how he had hated her, then nervously told her, “but I’ll have you know that I thought you were beautiful from about Day One.”

Her face fired up a bright, strong scarlet to challenge that of her vibrant hair. “Well.” She looked distinctly embarrassed.

“Now that was what I found annoying,” he continued softly, taking enjoyment from watching her blush. “There I was, trying to disappear, and then for some reason I couldn’t live without you, despite how I hated you... Then I wondered how much I actually hated you, after all.”

All of these things he’d hidden for as long as possible. How he couldn’t stand this strange, maddening transfer-student, but couldn’t stop watching her. How he loathed that popular, loud-mouthed Quidditch-player, but became annoyingly intoxicated when he was near her – even now he sometimes forgot how to breathe when he was around her. Now he spilled these secrets out to her, with no regrets.

That sheepish smile broke out on her lips again, biting her lip. “Okay, confession time for me, too. While you were daydreaming about this infuriatingly pretty girl, I was thinking of ways to murder you without anyone else noticing.”

Interesting...

Pain struck him, stabbing through him like knives set aflame. “You found the perfect way,” he remembered quietly. Just the memory was like sitting in fire and watching his skin melt.

“Did I?”

He hadn't meant for her to hear. Hadn't meant for her to realise how much she meant to him. Hadn't meant to let her know that her departure hadn't hurt him, hadn't upset him... it'd killed him. Only worse than death, because it left him alive. It spat him back out, pathetic and useless and no longer worth anything, alive in appearance but inside, dying, rotting, falling apart.

“...You left,” he reminded her reluctantly.

There was a short silence. “I'm sorry.”

It doesn't matter now. You're here, and that's all that's important.

“It's alright. Anyway-” He was brought back to reality, and he nodded at the silver box in her hands “-don't you want to know what your present is?” He poked it with one finger.

Ginevra didn't answer. She replied instead by unwrapping it eagerly. Once the box was open, she did nothing, said nothing, and for one horrible moment he thought that she didn't like it.

“Oh.”

That was a good 'oh', he presumed? Did she like it?

“It's nephrite,” he informed her, removing it from the box. “I thought that it would match your eyes.”

It was nothing close to her eyes. It was like sand and silver, butter and gold. It was best that he could do, save for cutting out her eye... Which he didn't think would make a good birthday necklace.

He clicked the clasp open and held it out. She could interpret that whichever way she wanted. She could understand that as here, take your necklace-

Or, he thought as she turned her back to him and lifted her cropped hair so that he could fasten it, she could understand that as let me put your necklace on for you.

“My eyes aren’t that pretty,” she murmured.

How wrong she was. By a thousand times, a million even, she was incorrect. “Yes, they are,” Tom whispered, passing the necklace over her head and fiddling with the clasp at the back, fumbling for a second before getting it right. “There.”

For a moment, he was unable to take his hands from the pale arch of her neck, his heart moving fast, struggling to breathe normally, and his fingers stayed there, tracing without touch her jawline. As if she could tell, she shivered, and Tom let go.

“Thank you.”

Ginevra didn’t turn around to face him once more. He was eternally grateful for this... he didn’t want her to see how hopelessly lost he was to her. It would show in his face, however hard he tried to hide it.

One he’d recovered himself, he asked quietly, “Shall we dance?”

“I can’t dance, you know that.”

You have two left feet. Three, even. It doesn’t show too much when you’re with me, though.

“Humour me.” He wanted a dance. That was all he was asking for.

She sighed. Tom held her hand again and took her back to the ‘dance-floor’, though he positioned them near the edges, as opposed to the centre, where surely they would be victims of staring and whispering gossip.

There was nothing but her.

Spinning out, spinning in, holding her close for the briefest of moments, his breath tickling her ear before she disappearing,

spinning off again for the next step of the song, the world slowed down in her twirling red hair. Then that abominable octave-drop of the notes being played. Tom knew what that signified. His heart beating a mile-a-minute, but slow like a submarine blip in the decelerated version of the song which they danced to – he dropped his hands down – there was her waist – oh God – holding tight – colour filled his face – concentrate – and then up, up, up, he lifted her, balancing her by his shoulder... totally depending on him, taking care of her.

The position of where his hand had to be to support her was making his face extremely hot, extremely fast.

Down she came as the music soared again – had he dropped her? She stumbled. With one swift movement, Tom snatched her out of the air from falling, and then jived on.

No-one was even watching. Just Ginevra and Tom. Tom and Ginevra. Like a sequence. Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra. One, never without the other. Or so he hoped.

Those angel's eyes were looking up into his, saving his soul, freeing his heart, and he smiled. He bent down his face to hers, nose touching, while they danced still, feet hopping, skipping, twisting, twirling together...

Eyes, gold and emerald and brown and honey and tea, soft and sweet and serene... her face, inches from his... lavender water and apples, the scent filling his nose... her heartbeat, perfectly in tune with his own, the two organs beating as one... I love you more than you can possibly understand... the love of someone who has never had anything, a love that should be spread across many things, many people, all directed into one glorious, beautiful girl...

He counted the familiar things that drew him in, the familiar things that made the kiss happen... freckles... face... those incredible eyes... lips... he closed his eyes, knowing what came next... for once, he didn't care that a thousand people were watching...

“Hey.”

Other people are around!

Tom snapped straight up in alarm. His gaze flickered briefly over Ginevra's stunned expression, and then he turned to see who'd interrupted their serene moment.

Reeve.

He was a metre or so from them, smiling at Ginevra. Ignoring Tom. The jealousy was flaring in both males' eyes.

"Can I have this dance?" Reeve asked. Foul, arrogant toad.

A slow song started. Tom's blood caught fire, flames burning in his veins. He resisted the urge to hit Reeve. He would not do that. He would not do that.

Yes, you will...

Stop it.

He was unstable at the moment, yes, but he would not lose control. Not here, not now.

"Fine," Ginevra snapped. She didn't sound pleased. Tom turned to see if her expression matched her voice, but by that time she'd already stomped away from him.

What on Earth was happening?

Reeve followed her. She was glaring, setting her hands on her hips, throwing a bracelet at him...

Why? Was the bracelet from Reeve? Tom's heart plunged. It was pearls. Pearls. All that he had given her was a silly little necklace, the prettiest thing that he could afford. Pearls. He couldn't beat that. Stupid, rich Reeve.

Breathing was becoming difficult and a hot anger that his other self only encouraged was burning up inside him. He tried to focus on what

he was looking at, not focusing on the feelings that the sight gave him. That was dangerous.

Reeve smirked at her in reply, saying something arrogant while she snarled, a cat with its tail stood on. She reached up and hit him. Nice one. Reeve didn't seem bothered by the stark red hand-mark on his cheek; he held out his arms for her. Ginevra slapped his arms away, talking furiously to him. Tom wondered what she was saying. Reeve said something in reply.

Ginevra stopped talking. She stared. Reeve stared back, his face reddening.

What the hell did you just say, Reeve? Choose your last words carefully.

She spoke again, rapidly, almost frantically – Reeve interrupting her and talking too –

“ARRRGH!” Ginevra growled.

Tom was slightly taken-aback by that Neanderthal-inspired snarl.

Reeve was saying something to her urgently... Ginevra looked stricken, as though she was hearing something that she didn't want to hear... telling him desperately something that Tom longed to eavesdrop on... what was happening...

And then Reeve kissed her.

Tom's jaw snapped tight as he stared wide-eyed at what was going on, his hands curling into tight fists so that he almost drew blood, something roaring inside him – hot, vicious anger in his chest - head pounding – eyes hazing - ...

Ginevra whacked Reeve around the face. “Scott!” he heard her cry out in horror.

He looked stunned, but quite pleased with himself.

Breathe. Breathe. In out in out in out-

He closed his eyes. Calm down. It's just a bit stuffy on the dance-floor. Yes. It's stuffy. You're feeling slightly claustrophobic. Nothing is wrong.

"Listen, Scott," Ginevra snarled. Tom opened his eyes, though it was probably a bad idea. He could hear what was happening now. "My high-heeled boots are about two metres away under that buffet table, and if you don't leave me and Tom the hell alone, then I will hit you with them, repeatedly, every waking moment, until you agree that you don't love me anymore!"

Tom stared. So did just about everyone else present.

Reeve's in love with her?

She came storming back towards him. "Let's get some food," she said, her voice sounding like a plea, and then she took hold of his elbow and pulled him after her towards the food.

Tom watched in silent amazement as she piled more and more onto her plate. "Do you think that you'll be able to survive the night on that pitiful quantity of food?" he asked sardonically.

"I'm hungry," she protested.

"I can see that." Though he meant to tease her, he couldn't push certain images from his mind. A pearl bracelet. A look of shock on her face. Her throwing, not the bracelet, but the necklace, at Reeve. The Ravenclaw's smug face danced in his head, singing I love her like you do... I'm richer and more popular than you... she's going to choose me...

Stop it, Tom ordered his brain.

Ginevra moved away and sat down with some of her friends; she looked back at him, expecting him to sit beside her.

For some reason, he avoided that, and sat opposite her. He looked at his food and prodded it quietly with his cutlery. "So, Reeve's in love with you, is he?" he finally asked, his voice low.

The blonde girl next to Ginevra – Roosevelt, Tom remembered her name to be – looked extremely interested in this. He was about to glare at her, but Ginevra did it for him before he could, and Roosevelt retreated to her own conversation.

"No. No, he's not."

"I thought that I heard you say-"

"I'm fairly sure he is."

"Well, then," said Ginny fiercely, "I'm going to have to hex him until he changes his mind. And that's final."

She won't hex me, sneered the Reeve inside Tom's head. She loves me too much. However, she's not afraid to slap you.

That was a year ago.

It still happened.

That was back when we hated each other; it's hardly surprising!

She's very popular and very pretty, you know. How many months do you think that you can hold onto her for while you're not here?

SHUT UP. Tom knew that this was no longer him talking to the imaginary Reeve. Around his fork, his hands formed fists, cutting again into his palm with his fingernails. He was arguing with himself, with the other version of himself, the one that was probably more truthful... SHUT UP SHUT UP-

Tom changed the topic by asking how her homework was, pretending calmly that there wasn't a voice in his head talking to him and telling him that he'd lose her sooner or later. Philips, Hartwin, Decrow, and

someone that he didn't know came to sit at the same table soon enough.

Hartwin, at one point, leant over to whisper something to Ginevra, which the redhead smiled at. Her smile faded however, when another male – this one a Slytherin, dressed in red – appeared behind her.

To his irritation, Tom couldn't hear very well what was happening. However, he could read body language, and was not happy with what he was reading so far.

"No," Ginevra said – he heard that – and she turned back to him.

"Don't deny me any longer, my darlin'" were the next words that Tom caught a glimmer of.

Darling – darling – darling –

Even though he was supposed to be pretending that he wasn't listening, Tom stared, his heart hammering violently inside his chest. His eyes were fading out, but he struggled to stay within his own head. That was not going to happen here. Not with so many people around. Not with her around.

Darling – darling – darling –

"Terby, get lost-" was all that Tom could hear before Ginevra turned backwards towards the student in red, obviously berating him viciously for some unseen crime.

Terby? He's sixth-year! He's sixteen – she's eighteen – I'm eighteen – that's not fair – inside his head, he was protesting childishly – on the outside, he was watching without much interest.

Terby turned and swaggered away with arrogance in every step.

"Is he in love with you, too?" Tom asked, subdued.

"No." She stood, grabbing his hand. "Let's dance."

Tom followed her onto the grassy area designated as the dance-floor, away from the eating area. As they stopped, he listened to the rhythm of the song. It was fairly slow. She twisted her fingers to hold his hand differently and lifted her other hand to his neck. Summoning courage, ignoring his fleeting pulse and heating face, he lightly held the small of her warm back.

Perfectly in time, they began to slowly spin.

Without any shoes on, she was tiny. The top of her head was level with his chin, but she tilted her face up to look at him, and he was drowning in her eyes, and somewhere, a million miles away, stars collided, planets exploded, universes caught fire-

“Alden knows!”

His stomach plunged down to his feet. Someone tipped a bucket of iced water over his head, he blinked his hair out of his eyes, he was numb with cold, he couldn’t dance anymore, he could feel nothing, just the cold, just the shivers building up – but he was still dry. He stared.

“I didn’t tell him! He worked it out. I mean, it was kind of obvious-”

What.

The numbness faded, but the temperature stayed, and he was icy, freezing –

She told she told she told you trusted and she told

“How... obvious?” he said coldly.

“No, I didn’t mean that. It’s just that Alden’s really smart, and I was jumpy about everything,” she said desperately. “Like, I kept dropping things whenever someone mentioned you. He guessed. I tried to deny it, but he was so stubborn. Then I attacked him and swore that I’d kill him if he told anyone. Remember how I told you that I fought with him? That’s why.”

He did recall her telling him about an argument, but never telling why.

She told she told she told

She begged, “He doesn’t know everything – he doesn’t know about you – he just knows about you and Amaris Malkin – and that you don’t do it intentionally – and – and please say something, Tom!”

She told she told she told

No. She didn’t. It wasn’t her fault.

SHE TOLD

Rip... tear...

SHE TOLD

She didn’t mean to.

“...It’s – it’s fine.” He was having difficulty making the words come out right. He snatched his gaze away from hers. He needed to think, and he couldn’t if all that he could see, feel, breathe – was her.

“No, it’s not – I’m so sorry,” she whispered. She sounded upset.

It wasn’t her fault.

Betrayal.

Kill... shred... destroy...

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

It wasn’t her fault.

“I told you, it’s fine.” His hand was still on her back. He let go and shoved his hand backwards through his hair. He couldn’t bring himself to release his hold on Ginevra’s other hand, however.

Ginevra sighed and pulled his hand. "Come on," she said softly. "I don't think that either of us feel like dancing anymore."

"I'm okay," he lied. "Let's dance." Still holding one hand, he twirled her under his arm, finishing the pirouette with her in his arms. It was something that felt so right. It gave him a brief moment when she wasn't looking for him to contain himself, to get himself under control again. "Besides, if we stop dancing, then we'll just sit down and make small-talk."

"Well... we could always go for a walk across the grounds..."

"Hm..." Tom considered this. "We could... but I don't think that your friends would appreciate me kidnapping you."

"Kidnap me?" Her voice was a mockery of shock. "With what intentions?"

A slight smile. "Only the worst." He spun her back to face him again, twirling her around, and then she went down again.

Catch her-

Tom didn't move quickly enough, and she collapsed in a heap on the grass. She sat there, laughing hysterically up at him. "I told you that I couldn't dance."

"Perhaps you should take a break," he said, the smallest of grins turning his lips. He lifted her to her feet, and, on a spur of the moment, curled his arm around her waist to walk with her towards where her companions were sitting, eating, and talking.

"We can withstand the small-talk. Torture is survivable," she teased, smiling up at him, and he realised that he loved her.

xxx

"Well, I'll say goodbye now, I suppose," Tom said, not really wanting to leave her behind, but knowing that he had to.

"I'll walk you to the edge of the grounds so that you can Apparate," she insisted.

He shook his head. "No. I'll walk you to the Entrance Hall, so that you can skip away with your friends, and I can go off without having to spend the next forty-eight hours worrying that you were kidnapped somewhere between the Hogwarts gates and your dormitory," he said, his voice light but his expression serious.

"Forty-eight hours?" She grabbed her shoes and fell into step with him, though she had to take unnaturally large steps to keep up. He slowed down for her.

"The time it would – at best – take for me to send you a letter, and then for you to reply, thus confirming your safety," he explained. "Also, can I ask why you chose not to wear your shoes?"

"They're brand-new; Flora got them for me. "They're just about the most painful thing I've ever had curse my clothing itinerary." She showed him the shoes. He knew nothing about female clothing, and didn't really know what he was looking for that would be painful, but had to admit that they look alarmingly pointy. She changed her boots to the other hand and took his. "So did you have fun tonight, against all odds?"

"Fun?" An eyebrow lifted. "I'm not quite sure. A few moments were priceless, though others I'd have gladly missed out on," he said, mostly to himself. Reeve's face grinned at him through the darkness, not really existing, but so vivid that Tom wanted to reach out so that he could crush it.

"Such as?" Ginevra probed.

"Hm... I enjoyed watching you hit Reeve around the face, for one thing..." She blushed, and a smirk twisted his features.

"I liked that, too. Nothing can satisfy a person quite like slapping someone else." She beamed at him, though distinctly pink in the face.

He stopped in the shadows by the Entrance Hall steps, so that no-one else could stare and scowl and whisper. He disliked the majority of Hogwarts students for that very reason. In fact, there was only one that he really liked – Ginevra, obviously – but Philips, the new Head Boy, was tolerable, and he had been able to get used to Fionn after a while.

“This is where I leave you,” Tom said reluctantly. “I only realise now that I haven’t really talked to you. I think that there were too many people... but what can be said out loud can be easily said in a letter, of course.”

He had hoped to tell her tonight... but that would have to wait...

“Can’t I smuggle you into the castle somewhere and hide you?” Ginny asked, batting her eyelashes hopefully.

He smiled. “I’m afraid that would probably come under the ‘intruder’ category.” He could see the best part of his life in her hazel eyes. “Happy birthday, Ginevra.” He didn’t let go of her hand. He lowered his face to hers and pressed his lips to hers.

Things going on elsewhere lost all meaning. He felt dizzy. His blood raced and he could hear his heart inside his skull.

I love you.

Tom wanted to hold her tight, but was afraid. Of the other students. Of the teachers nearby. Of having to let her go. Of Reeve. Of her not wanting to hold him. He settled for this, but knew that it couldn’t last forever... and oxygen was becoming a problem. Perhaps not for her, but he preferred breathing, and pulled away.

Ginevra pouted slightly as his face moved away from hers, which wasn’t helping his case. He looked down into her oceans of eyes... and saw something that might be love. He wasn’t sure. He wanted to imagine that it was, but voices were echoing in his head and growls were sounding in his chest and Reeve’s face was drifting through his conscience, and all of them said no.

“Inside. Now,” he told her firmly. He didn’t want her staying out in the cold and the dark after he left. “I’ll see you soon.” Tom’s eyes stayed on hers, falling in, falling under...

Breathe her in. Remember her. Remember this.

Then he left, and his own thoughts haunted him all the way home.

xxx

A/N: I had someone saying that Tom is too perfect? I can’t remember who. Sorry, I forgot to memorise who that was so that I can say your name. Well, um, he’s really not. Even though in some aspects he’s clichéd – tall, good-looking, sweet, poetic (as is so apparent from his POV, lol)... but then we have the other things. Like:

His insecurity a mile wide.

His spontaneous panic attacks.

He gets annoyed really easily and has a big temper when he does get really angry.

He’s not just in love with her, he doesn’t just think that she’s pretty, he is so, totally, OBSESSIVELY in love with her. I mean, even in Backtrack, when she comes too close, he forgets how to breathe. When she kisses him, he falls over and hits his head. As I put earlier in the fic... I can’t remember if it was Rewind or Press Play... he hasn’t really got anything of his own. I mean, you love your possessions, right? He hasn’t really got any. You love your family, right? He hasn’t got any. He had one, which was his dad, but he kind of spoiled that by killing him... so literally, this massive love that should be spread out into a million different little things, is just directed into her. Hey, I said it in this chapter, actually. Go me! So yeah. He’s actually kind of obsessed, to be honest.

...THE FACT THAT HE KILLS PEOPLE? And the fact that every time a single thing happens – a single flicker of annoyance, jealousy, upset, and then there’s something inside him screaming at him to kill her. Which can’t be easy for him, honestly.

Sorry. Had to say. If that sounded mean, I'm sorry. I'm very defensive of my fictional characters. :P

Did anyone else find it SO funny that he got all embarrassed because he had to hold her arse? I LOVED THAT! If you missed it, go back to the first dance, before Scott interrupted. He lifted her into the air, but to keep her there, he had to hold her arse. HAHAHAHA. I'm a genius. Albeit an evil one.

And some people have been making predictions for what's going to happen later. I'm not going to tell you what prediction is right, or who made it, but someone is right. Dead right. –wink-

If you missed that, I just gave you a big hint.

Next Time:

Having Tom come only for a couple of hours and then go again made Ginny miss him even more. She hated her dependency on him. It was like something eating away at her stomach. At least now she had told him about Alden's knowledge. She wondered what he had wanted to let her know yesterday but hadn't been able to because of all the people around.

xxx

OMIGOD! I JUST HAD A MASSIVE PLOT-BUNNY! LIKE, RIGHT NOW! FSAGFJSDAKFGNJASNFGLANGJFGKDSZA.

WOW, I'M GOOD!

Ohhhhh that's such a good idea. But I'm not telling you what it is. You have to wait. Ooooooooooh. But I don't know where to put it. Maybe in Fast Forward. Yeah. Good.

Chapter Ten: Survivor's Guilt

Ginny stayed standing on the middle step, watching his retreating back. Her fingers found the nephrite pendant around her throat and her heart sang.

"Inside. Now," he told her firmly. He didn't want her staying out in the cold and the dark after he left. "I'll see you soon." Tom's eyes stayed on hers, falling in, falling under... Then he left, and his own thoughts haunted him all the way home.

xxx

Having Tom come only for a couple of hours and then go again made Ginny miss him even more. She hated her dependency on him. It was like something eating away at her stomach. At least now she had told him about Alden's knowledge. She wondered what he had wanted to let her know yesterday but hadn't been able to because of all the people around.

When the following morning came around, the redhead dressed quickly, urged Grace to do the same, and then they hurried up to the Great Hall together.

"Why are we moving so fast this morning?" Grace complained as they sat down.

"Because I want to get my post early," Ginny told her as she helped herself to toast. "There was something that Tom wanted to tell me, but he didn't have time to. He said that he was going to tell me in his letter today."

Grace groaned. "That's it?" she hit her head on the wooden table. "I thought that it was something important."

Ginny huffed, affronted. "It is important."

"The owls are going to come at the same time as always," Grace pointed out, lifting her forehead from the tabletop. "Getting here earlier is just going to make it take longer."

Annoyingly, Grace was right – something that rarely happened, and because of this she usually gloated. They had to wait a full fifteen minutes of eating painfully slowly and drinking their pumpkin juice sip by sip before the clatter of wings and beaks sounded as a thousand owls swept through the windows near the roof.

“Yes,” Ginny said triumphantly as a barn-owl dropped a letter into her hands.

Alden had arrived by that time. He didn’t have any post. As usual, Grace had a visit from Astor, her tiny pet owl who was as clumsy as its owner, who fell into the marmalade. The letter then had to be cleaned.

“See you in a minute,” said Ginny, taking the letter, grabbing her schoolbag and leaving the Great Hall.

“Too good to let us be around when you read it, eh?” Claude’s snide voice sounded as she left. She ignored her.

Ginevra, it said when she opened it outside.

I’ve decided that I did have... ‘fun’ at the barbeque. Congratulations. Now that I’ve had fun, I don’t have to do it ever again. Don’t worry – I’m not serious. Anyway, what I wanted to tell you yesterday was that I’m buying an apartment in London... or at least trying to. It’s not far from Diagon Alley, which is useful for going to work, though I’m also considering finding an occupation elsewhere, as I really am finding Flourish and Blott’s quite boring, despite the fact that I’ve only worked there for two months. Also, I noticed yesterday that a lot of people were staring at us strangely... meaning everyone. Has something happened?

I hope to hear from you soon.

Tom

Oh dear.

He'd realised that everyone was looking at them weirdly. That was bad. That was quite bad indeed. Because now she'd have to tell him that people suspected them of murder.

Alden knowing about his issues was one thing, as Alden could be trusted, and also Tom knew Alden fairly well.

But the whole school?

She didn't think that it'd go down very well.

Ginny folded the letter away into her bag, and wondered what job he was thinking about changing to. She, personally, thought that he'd be a good teacher – he was so smart (he had been Head Boy for a reason) – but all of the teaching positions at Hogwarts were full, and also he'd probably get fired instantly for being involved with a student... namely, her.

Another thought came to her.

Quidditch season.

It was only a couple of days to the first match – Slytherin-Gryffindor. Last year, Ginny hadn't been playing for the Gryffindor game, because that was when she had moved back into the future for a brief time, so she didn't know what they were like.

She hoped that her Gryffindor instincts wouldn't come back to her; the last thing that she wanted was to pass to the wrong team.

xxx

In the changing rooms, everything was a blur of green and silver as Jack Swihin prepared the Slytherin team for the year's first game.

“-so try diversionary tactics, Vegrandis. It worked last year; it might work this year, too. Philips, you're doing fine. Make sure to pass. Don't be put off by whatever the commentator says about your age. Peregrine, you're good. Don't get knocked out by a Bludger again-”

She went red; the team chuckled.

“-Flax, concentrate the hardest when the Quaffle is being thrown to you. Don’t drop it. Here’s some motivation – if you don’t drop it, I won’t kill you later. Devine, you’re good. Just don’t get distracted by the girls,” Jack grunted.

Bernard grinned at Ginny; she glared back at him.

“Okay. Let’s go.” Jack grabbed his broomstick and left the changing rooms.

The rest of the team followed, getting in the appropriate formation as they walked onto the pitch. The Gryffindors were already out there, bathing pathetically in the audience’s praise. Ginny was opposite Faisal Alfonso, a Beater. “D’you think that you’re big-headed enough yet?” she shot at him.

Alfonso opened his mouth to fire back a retort, but then the whistle was blown and everyone launched into the air – and he hadn’t even mounted his broomstick yet.

Ginny laughed as the seventh-year Gryffindor was left behind; she powered after Conor Poole, a fifth-year who was presently holding the Quaffle.

“Poole has the Quaffle, and he’s dodging Slytherins – look at him go – pass to Webber – to Poole again – to Goulding-”

Percival Goulding, one of Luke Webber and Faisal Alfonso’s buddies, had a younger brother who passed far but didn’t fly very fast. Ginny caught up to him easily.

“-tackled by Peregrine – pass to Flax – he fumbles – is he going to drop it- no, he’s got it under control – to Philips – good God, look at that kid go! He’s up the pitch – Slytherin score!”

The score-boards ticked up to ten-zero to Slytherin.

“NICE ONE,” Ginny yelled in encouragement to the young Chaser, who was only twelve, and lacking in confidence. Dominic beamed proudly at her.

“Fletcher passes from the hoops to Goulding – to Webber – Bludger hit by Defoe – just missing Peregrine-”

Ginny’s hair whipped backwards in the vacuum that the speeding Bludger caused by air. Whoa! She could see her team-mates laughing at her in between flying and doing their parts for the game – “nearly,” they said, “not quite knocked off her broom this time.”

She ignored them and flew after Webber.

“-interception by Flax – pass to Philips – to Peregrine – back to Philips – to Flax – Poole tackles – but it doesn’t work – Flax to Peregrine – back to Flax – to Philips again – Slytherin score!”

Twenty-zero to us – boo-yah!

“Damn, that little kid is a good flier. Don’t we all wish we could have some of him for our teams?” said the commentator. Ginny glanced over and saw that he was a Hufflepuff – annoying as hell, but fair. “Fletcher tosses the Quaffle up – to Goulding – to Webber – to Goulding – moving like lightning – Poole – Webber – Peregrine tackles – fails – Goulding again – Gryffindor score!”

Ginny spun the back-end of her broomstick, halting her flight immediately. She glared at Bernard. What, and he couldn’t even save that pathetic shot?

He threw it to her. She caught it easily and swooped away with it.

Let Bernard have Jack’s fury later.

“Peregrine to Flax – back to Peregrine – dodging and diving – has Callick seen the Snitch? No, I don’t think so... but has Vegrandis – false alarm – no suck luck – Peregrine passes to Flax – he drops it – caught by Alfonso – he’s not a Chaser! Is he allowed to do that? He

passes to Webber – no-one seems to be calling any sort of penalty, so I guess it's okay – Gryffindor score!”

Ginny spun again. “That was easy!” she yelled at Bernard. “I could have saved that; what are you doing?!”

“DEVINE, PLAY QUIDDITCH,” bellowed Jack, red in the face, “INSTEAD OF SPENDING THE WHOLE TIME STARING AT PEREGRINE’S ARSE!”

“What?” Ginny yelped.

“There seems to be some kind of team conflict for the Slytherins... they need to hurry up and start playing soon-”

A growl rumbled from inside Ginny’s chest. She wanted to throw something at Bernard, but the only thing available was the Quaffle, and if she scored an own-goal by accident then Jack was eat her intestines for lunch.

Bernard threw the Quaffle to Rupert Flax, a guilty pink flush creeping across his cheeks, but he still managed to give Ginny a sparkling smile before she zipped away towards the Gryffindor hoops.

“and Slytherin score!”

The boards moved up: thirty-twenty to the Slytherin team.

Then forty-twenty.

Poole tried to score, but thankfully Bernard was behaving himself now and he saved it with ease.

Fifty-twenty.

Fifty-thirty.

Bernard saved another one.

Samuel Fletcher, the Keeper for Gryffindor, saved one.

Sixty-thirty.

Seventy-thirty.

Ginny caught the Quaffle on a pass from Dominic and was flying up the field-

“-Bludger strike from Alfonso –“

It was heading for her – that wasn’t fair – not again – she was so close to the hoops – At the last second, Ginny twisted weirdly sideways and got out of the way just in time... there was a sickening CRUNCH as it hit someone else.

In the distraction as everyone else gasped and oohed and ahed in horror, she hurled the Quaffle to the hoops and ticked another point up.

She turned to see who’d been struck, and felt her stomach drop when she saw that the broken, bleeding team-player was from the Slytherin team... and was a lot smaller than anyone else.

“Dom!” She flew towards Flax, who was supporting the second-year’s thin, battered body on his own broomstick.

“Er, we’re going to need some help,” Flax muttered.

“How bad is it?” Ginny asked worriedly. She felt personally responsible for looking after the younger student, not just because she was friends with him, not just because sometimes she tutored him after school to teach him flying tricks, but also because he was the baby brother of one of her best friends.

Flax looked at her with a duh expression on his face. “He got hit in the face.”

“And Vegrandis has seen the Snitch!” roared an excited commentator into the microphone.

Ginny looked up, delighted. “GO, VEGRANDIS!” she hollered, torn between looking after Dom and cheering for the game. Leaving Vegrandis to win the game for Slytherin, she told Flax to keep playing if he could do it alone, took Dominic onto her broomstick and flew him down to the ground.

“Miss Peregrine,” said Professor Dippet, appearing from a nearby doorway and helping her to carry Dominic out through the changing rooms. “Allow me to Levitate him.”

“No, it’s fine, he’s not heavy,” said Ginny; she was quite strong, even though he was about thirty-five kilograms. Also, she wanted to hold onto him, as though doing that could make up for nearly getting his head knocked off by a Bludger.

As she entered the Hospital Wing, Alden and Grace caught up, sprinting along behind.

“Dom!” Alden yelled, running up. “He got – his – and – he – he’s dead, isn’t he?” he said hopelessly, clinging onto his little brother as Ginny lowered him onto the white bed.

“He’ll be okay,” said Madam Royce, bustling over. “Just get off him, now, don’t be silly, move, now, come on. Out of the way.”

Reluctantly, Alden stepped back. It wasn’t pretty, but Alden watched determinedly as the matron mopped up the blood to discover missing teeth and a broken nose and a fractured skull and a broken neck.

“He’s dead!” Alden exclaimed in horror.

“Mr. Philips, please. He’s going to be alright, if you’d just stop panicking,” said Dippet consolingly.

“Ald,” Grace said, holding onto his elbow. “Breathe.”

It was more obvious than ever than Alden Philips had grown over the summer. As opposed to reaching her shoulder, he now stood just up to Grace’s ear. He held onto the end bedpost of where Dominic lay and stared down at his sibling.

“...Alden... I’m really sorry...” Ginny tried awkwardly. “It was aimed at me, but I ducked out of the way so that I could score, and hit him instead. I didn’t know that it was going to get him in particular – I didn’t realise anyone was just behind me – but still, I’m sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” said the Head Boy, but he looked as though he was still trying to convince himself of this fact.

This didn’t make Ginny feel any better, neither did the later knowledge that Slytherin had won the match. Survivor’s guilt washed over her. Dominic had a fractured skull and a broken neck. Any shards of bone could have gone into his brain or his spinal chord, and they just didn’t know. They couldn’t tell if he was unconscious, comatose... or dead. If he wasn’t already, then the highest probability was that he’d die soon.

And it should have been her.

xxx

A/N: Oh no! SadlyUnconsciousAndLimp!Dom! What are we going to do?? Yeah. Hehe. I’m really happy! I’ve finally outlined the whole plot down to the last detail for Press Play, which means I can start outlining the plot for Fast-Forward. But I’m also annoyed, because I forgot about Quidditch. Which means that I have to squish a few Quidditch-y chapters in there, and disrupt it all. Meh.

What was I about to say? Er. Oh yeah! A warning that it’s going to get angsty, fast.

BREAKING DAWN SPOILERS: I finally finished it! It was so good, even though I really don’t like vampire Bella. Or Nessie. The things that I liked about Bella were that she had flaws, like sometimes doing stupid things, and especially how clumsy she was. And then she becomes a vampire and gets all perfect. Mrawr. –annoyance radiates- And Nessie just pisses me off. She’s too perfect. The only thing I like about her is how dramatically she killed her mum. :D

Next Time:

No preview, sadly, because I can't put anything in here without giving LOADS away.

Xxx

Chapter Eleven: In Her Head

This didn't make Ginny feel any better. Survivor's guilt washed over her. Dominic had a fractured skull and a broken neck. Any shards of bone could have gone into his brain or his spinal chord, and they just didn't know. They couldn't tell if he was unconscious, comatose... or dead. If he wasn't already, then the highest probability was that he'd die soon.

And it should have been her.

xxx

Ginny was asleep in the library, spending a free-period well, slumped in a chair with her face in an open book. She'd had many sleepless nights.

As she snored quietly on the desk, her head was anything but empty.

Shouting. Crying. Eyes turning black. Someone that she knew becoming someone that he wasn't. Broken glass. Blood. Screaming. The slam of a door.

She twitched. It started again.

"I don't, I swear!" Tears in hazel eyes.

A face blurred and dark eyes twisted, turning black as night, red-rimmed, unfamiliar. Backing away towards the door, not finding it, pressing her back against the wall.

Running, glass breaking, blood dripping, a scream.

Horror in his eyes. He runs.

"No," she muttered, twitching.

"I'm sorry – I admit, I did it. But not intentionally! I was upset, and he was just – just there!"

“And I wasn’t, I get it. If you really lov-”

“I don’t, I swear!” she cries. Her eyes are filling with tears.

He’s shaking, he’s shuddering, his eyes are darkening, he’s struggling but it’s not working... she realises what was happening and backs away, she can’t find the door, the wall is behind her, she presses up against it.

She runs – a smash – pain and red dripping down her cheek – she screams –

And then he remembers. He understands. He stares at what he’s done. And he runs.

“No!” She jerked. The book shot off the table and hit the floor with a bang, waking her up.

People were staring at her. Ginny found that there were tears on her cheeks. Oh no. Not in public. She grabbed her bags, threw the book inside one of them, and fled the library. She needed to find Alden.

Admittedly, she couldn’t talk truthfully to Alden – the male Slytherin didn’t know everything about Tom, and she couldn’t tell him the majority of the dream... but he was the best person that she had for telling about how her every fear had been realised in this dream. All fears for him.

He had sounded like he wanted to break up with her.

He had been possessed because he was so upset.

He had attacked her.

He had become even more upset because he had attacked her.

He had run away.

Alden, where are you?

Ginny ran faster, her heart pounding, her head swimming. She needed to grab onto someone tight and wail her problems at them. She needed a hug. She needed chocolate. She needed someone who she could tell everything to – everything. About Tom, about herself. About being from the future, about being in love with a weird parasite person who was over-emotional and could accidentally kill people at any moment, about being so scared to fall any deeper...

She whirled around the corner, and crashed into someone at high-speed. She fell over, nearly taking the person down with her, but thankfully he – she - it? – caught and steadied her.

“Whoa, there,” someone drawled. “Who’s set your skirt on fire?”

“Bernard,” she realised it was.

“That’s me,” he said, looking down at her as he held her. “Is everythin’ okay, doll?”

Scott had called Ginny doll, but somehow when Bernard said it, it sounded okay. Perhaps it was the Texan drawl that made it sound like something out of that Muggle film, *Grease* (which, Ginny remembered, was set in this time-period.) Perhaps it was the velvet voice that said it.

“No,” said Ginny unhappily. She wasn’t sure why she was telling him, or why she’d forgiven the fact that he’d been staring at her derriere all through the first half of the Quidditch match. She couldn’t blab out as much as she’d wanted to, but it was good enough. “I had a bad dream.”

“Aw.” He tilted her chin with one finger. “Cheer up. Happens all the time, y’know.”

“Yeah, but this was a really bad one,” she said miserably, and, to her embarrassment, she felt tears pricking at the corners of her eyes again.

“What was it about, then?” Bernard asked softly. He seemed nice, for once.

She sniffed. "Tom."

"Riddle?"

"Yeah."

"Kay, you don' need to tell me any more if you don' wanna," Bernard said consolingly. She was extremely grateful for this respect of privacy. "You can just use me to cry on, if you want."

"Thanks," she said, her voice strangled with her pathetic tears. She was ashamed of herself, but it didn't stop her from clinging onto the attractive boy in front of her and using his shoulder to rest her head on.

Bernard lifted one finger and gently brushed one teardrop away from her freckled cheek. Then, somehow – Ginny had no idea how – he ended up pressing his lips against hers and crushing her to his chest.

And she alarmed herself by liking it a hell of a lot more than she should have.

It was funny how there was always a little voice called her Conscience that warned her about getting a crush on Bernard had abruptly shut up, deciding not even to call the this isn't fair on Tom card into play, as it usually did.

Her eyes closed by themselves, and she was tangling herself in his hair and his face and his mouth-

Scott Reeve came around the corner. He wanted to shout, throw something, but he didn't. He stared at the kissing couple for a second, horror sinking in as he watched the girl that he was starting to think that he was in love with... with that stupid sixth-year turd, Bernard Terby. He wanted to do the worst thing possible. He wanted to kill Terby. He wanted to hold Ginny for himself...

And a plan hatched in his head.

He watched for a good long time, no matter how much it hurt... made sure that he could see that Ginny wasn't resisting... no, not at all... and then, as they broke apart, Scott turned, and hurried away.

In the confines of the Ravenclaw seventh-year's boys' dormitory, where no-one else could disturb him (his room-mates were all elsewhere), Scott removed the memory of what he had just seen. The memory of Ginny and Bernard Terby kissing.

He bottled it.

He wrapped it in paper and put it in an envelope.

He inked the words Tom Riddle on it.

And then he sent it.

xxx

Ginny suddenly fell back into her own shoes, and realised what the hell was going on. She removed her hands from his silky brown hair – it was as soft and shiny as it looked – and from his back, planted them both firmly on his chest and shoved him backwards.

“What?” Bernard stumbled backwards from where he'd pinned her to the wall.

“I've told you before, I'm taken,” Ginny said, but she couldn't make her words come out as fiercely as she'd wanted them to, because she was battling for breath. Her face was bright red, freckles standing out like paint on glass, her hair more dishevelled than normal, her heart beating a mile a minute.

“Oh yeah,” Bernard said, smirking. “I remember how for every second of that kiss you were telling me, ‘Bernard, get off, I've already got a boyfriend’... I remember now.”

She turned even more scarlet – if that was possible.

“Admit it,” Bernard purred, “you liked it.”

“No, I didn’t,” she lied adamantly.

His smirk doubled in size. “I know that you did.”

“Oh? How?” she snapped, not believing him for a second. He couldn’t possibly know how pretty she thought he was.

“Let’s just say I have the tiniest special ability,” he said coolly. “Sort of Leglimency... only permanent.”

Ginny gasped. Her hands flew instinctively to her temples. He could see into her head! That was why he hadn’t probed her further for what her dream was about – he already knew. That was why he kept making moves on her – because he knew it was working. He knew that she liked him, he knew that if he kissed her then she wouldn’t resist, he knew that she was like soft caramel that he could shape however he liked if he warmed her up right.

Bernard stepped closer. “Caramel?” he whispered breathily.

“GET OUT OF MY HEAD,” she yelled at him, and ran.

xxx

The dream was quickly forgotten in the shock of learning that Bernard Terby could see into her head. She forgot about going to find Alden. Instead, she sat down to write a reply to Tom. She couldn’t tell him as much as she longed to, of course, but it was good to talk to him.

Tom,

Hooray! Trust me, having... FUN is a good thing. You should try it more often!! Really, what’s the address? Then I can actually give the owls an address as opposed to just telling them to ‘find Tom Riddle’, somewhere in the big wide world. Or I could come at visit you at some point. A new job? Where are you thinking about moving to? Everything’s alright down this end, Grace is thinking about asking out Professor Devin’s son... should be interesting. Alden and Philippa

Decrow are an item after the barbeque, and the first Quidditch match is tomorrow! Wish me luck!

She stared at the letter that he'd written to her first. Especially the question as to why people were staring. He hadn't been supposed to notice that. She'd hoped that it would pass by his sharp eyes. Maybe this would, too, if she simply avoided it.

Guilt was panging in her stomach. She had to tell him. She had to tell him. The sentence 'I accidentally kissed Terby' constructed itself in her head, but the pen wouldn't write it. She couldn't. She had to... but she couldn't.

Love, Ginny xxx

She headed up to the Owlery, selected a sturdy-looking horned-owl and sent the letter off through the window to the one that she loved but hid so much from.

xxx

Twenty-four hours later, a thousand miles away in London, Tom Riddle came back to his new apartment, tired from work, having a new assignment for the following day. He removed his coat and as he hung it up, he noticed not one, but two owls sitting on his windowsill.

There was a large horned one and a slightly smaller one. One carried a parcel, the other a small letter.

One was probably from Ginevra. He wondered who else was sending him post.

Curious, he opened the parcel first.

A bottle fell out.

xxx

A/N: OH NOOOO! Hahaha. Was that a good chapter or what? I love Bernard, he's like an evil, perverted version of Jasper from Twilight.

With a bit of Edward mixed in. Teehee! WOW, I'm all jumpy now from updating!

Next Time:

The redhead was quite worried by the appearance of the letter... it was very small and very thin. Not a lot seemed to be written on it. She unfolded it and read the words on it. Her heart skipped a couple of beats in alarm.

I need to talk to you.

Xxx

It's time for the ANGST-DANCE!

Chapter Twelve: Broken Glass

In the confines of the Ravenclaw seventh-year's boys' dormitory, where no-one else could disturb him (his room-mates were all elsewhere), Scott removed the memory of what he had just seen. The memory of Ginny and Bernard Terby kissing. He bottled it. He wrapped it in paper and put it in an envelope. He inked the words Tom Riddle on it. And then he sent it.

She headed up to the Owlery, selected a sturdy-looking horned-owl and sent the letter off through the window to the one that she loved but hid so much from.

Twenty-four hours later, a thousand miles away in London, Tom Riddle came back to his new apartment, tired from work, having a new assignment for the following day. He removed his coat and as he hung it up, he noticed not one, but two owls sitting on his windowsill. There was a large horned one and a slightly smaller one. One carried a parcel, the other a small letter. One was probably from Ginevra. He wondered who else was sending him post. Curious, he opened the parcel first. A bottle fell out.

xxx

Guilt was a terrible thing.

She felt guilty for letting Dominic Philips get hurt while she got off unharmed by the Bludger aimed for her.

She felt guilty for kissing Bernard Terby and not telling Tom.

She felt guilty for having the possibility of the whole of Hogwarts knowing that Tom had killed people, and not telling him.

She felt guilty for telling Alden about Tom by accident.

Ginny was, eventually, left curled up in a sofa in the Slytherin common room, listening to Claude and Avani forming crude rumours in the corner based on things that they'd heard and seen, pretending

that she couldn't see Bernard watching her from a distance, and also pretending that she was listening to Grace and Alden's chatter.

"Hey, are you okay?" Grace's voice cut through the redhead's daydreams.

"Huh?" Ginny looked over in surprise. "Er, yeah, I'm okay."

"You don't look okay," Grace said doggedly. "Is everything cool?"

"Everything's cool," Ginny replied. "Honestly, I'm fine." Except that I think that the guilt in my stomach is going to pull me to pieces. She beamed around at her friends.

There was a flutter of wings, and an owl flew in through one of the special chutes that led down from outside.

Most people's attention was momentarily drawn to the appearance of the large bird, but their eyes flickered away after a while, returning to whatever they were doing.

"I think it's for you, Ginny," Alden said, looking up from the game of Wizard Chess that he was beating Grace at.

"How do you know?" Grace frowned at the black-and-white squares. "Er... knight, F6." There was the scratch as the little wooden piece moved forward, and then a clunk as the knight defeated some poor castle.

"It's staring at her," Alden said dryly, glancing up again. "Queen, C3."

Ginny looked up at the owl. It was indeed watching her carefully and looking at no-one else. Deciding that the only way to find out was to try and take the letter that it was holding, she clambered off the sofa and went to attempt to retrieve the parchment in the bird's talons.

"Hey," Ginny tried with a smile at the owl. Charms had never worked on owls before, but there had to be a first for everything, right?

Looking bored, the owl dropped the letter and flew away.

Fine. Don't talk to me.

The redhead was quite worried by the appearance of the letter... it was very small and very thin. Not a lot seemed to be written on it.

She unfolded it and read the words on it.

Her heart skipped a couple of beats in alarm.

I need to talk to you.

21-5D Redrick Apartments

Market Crescent

Southern London

What was going on? Why did Tom need to talk to her so urgently? And about something bad, judging by the lack of any sort of letter-y punctuation. He hated to write letters casually... it had to be important.

"Was it for you?" Alden asked.

"Yeah," said Ginny absently, still looking at the letter and wondering what had gone wrong.

"I told you!" Alden said to Grace. "Now, forfeit one of your bishops." Grace grumbled, and reluctantly tossed over one of the black pieces from her side of the board.

Now they're making bets about me.

"Er, guys, I have to go," she said, not really sure how to say why. "There's some sort of problem... will you cover for me if I go away?"

Grace looked up, slightly astonished. "Why do you have to go away?"

"I just do." Ginny folded her arms. "Please cover for me?"

“Yeah, yeah, okay,” said Alden, waving a hand at her. “Don’t get us in trouble, though. Or yourself.” He handed her some Floo powder from the Head Boy’s special Floo tin (she didn’t know why he had to have one... but he did), and as she walked away, their eyes met, and she saw a look that said that he knew what problem she had to go and fix.

Even when she didn’t.

Ginny threw the light green powder into the flames, and then climbed in, saying, “21-5D Redrick Apartments, Market Crescent, London.”

Lights flashed – she hit her head on the side of the chimney – and she disappeared.

xxx

“Ow,” was the first thing that she said when she was thrown out of the chimney of the other side. The second was, “Am I in the right place?” and the third, “Hellooo?”

She was standing – actually, kneeling, in a pile of soot – at the edge of a smallish, tidy apartment. Mostly everything was cream and beige and brown, those standard furniture-that-comes-with-the-house-because-it’s-ugly-and-no-one-else-wants-it colours, but other colours were mostly dark green.

She suspected she was in the right place.

However, some things were unusual of the person whose house it should have been. Such as the smashed plate, not tidied up. The broken glass. The coffee table, at a weird angle, like someone had pushed it angrily.

Visions whirled through her head.

He swiped at a nearby plate – it hit the wall and shattered. Anger coursing through him. He kicked the table and then went to write a letter, the pen digging deep into the parchment, as if he could take out his fury on the paper...

She shook her head. No. That was silly.

Then, suddenly, he was there.

Ginny sensed that he may have been there the whole time, and that she had only just noticed him staring darkly at her from the other side of the room.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, clapping her hands to her heart. “Wow, you nearly gave me a heart-attack.” She smiled nervously. “Um... I like your apartment!” She glanced around again. “It’s kind of empty, but that’s understandable, I guess... it’s look kind of like minimalism though. Like, simplicity at it’s finest. It looks cool.”

“How can you stand there and go on and on about trivial things as though you have no idea what you’ve done?”

His voice was a mockery of amazement; frosty and distant and lethal. For the first time in a long time, she couldn’t read him. What she saw on his face was a mask of icy anger, and nothing else.

“I-” she stammered. “I don’t quite understand.”

Tom’s lip curled. “Beverage?” he asked coldly, and without warning threw her a small bottle so quickly that she almost didn’t quite catch it.

Damn, he should be on the Quidditch team.

“What-?”

“Drink it.”

There wasn’t much left in the bottle. What was there was thick, swirly grey liquid. It look liked a bottled cloud. Hesitantly, Ginny uncorked it. She considered sniffing it, but she doubted that Tom would be angry enough to try and poison her. She took a deep breath and drank some.

The memory hit her instantly.

Bernard lifted one finger and gently brushed one teardrop away from her freckled cheek. Then he pressed his lips against hers and crushed her to his chest. He held her there tightly, kissing her-

OH GOD. Not this. Who had seen this? Who had sent this?

She was running her hands through his hair and pulling him closer-

"Stop it," Ginny said, trying to rip back into reality.

Pinning her to the wall-

"Okay, stop it!" Ginny cried, digging her fingernails into her head. "I know – I know."

Then the memory began to fade, ending with the words I thought that you should know.

Ginny felt sick to her stomach. What sort of twisted person would deliberately do this to her? What had she ever done to them?

Tom stared at her in silence, not speaking, not saying anything. His expression said it all. She'd brought every one of his insecurities to life.

"I didn't do it on purpose," Ginny said.

"I can see that from way you were struggling to get him off you," Tom replied sarcastically.

"No, it's not like that-"

"It bloody looks like it is!" Tom snapped.

"Well, it's not!" Ginny shouted at him. "It was an accident! Honestly, he's a year younger than me – why would I go off with him instead of you? Anyway, he's sort of a pervert; he was staring at my bum all through the Quidditch match. He snogs anything in a skirt – it's not just me. It wasn't supposed to happen."

Tom seemed to be struggling for calm breathing. “Do you have any idea how hard this is for me?” he said angrily. “I’ve got this stupid job in a bookshop, and I can barely afford to keep my apartment – and the one thing I depend on is you! Then some anonymous person sends me a memory of you – and – and – Terby – and you!”

“Tom-”

“What I kept thinking was, what if it was an accident? What if wasn’t her fault, despite how she seemed to be all over him, but... then, surely, she would tell me in a letter ‘Terby kissed me but it’s no big deal, don’t worry’... right? Right? So, let’s have a look at the latest letter. Some stupid chatter about Alden and Philippa Decrow – because I REALLY give a damn about that!! However, you don’t think that perhaps it would be a good idea to MENTION that you’ve been having a good time with Terby! You just thought, did you, that you’d pretend it never happened?”

“I’m sorry – I admit, I did it. But not intentionally! I was upset, and he was just – just there!”

“And I wasn’t, I get it. If you really lov-”

“I don’t, I swear!” Ginny cried. This was going badly. Oh no, this was bad, this was bad. Tears were crowding her hazel eyes and she couldn’t stop them from forming. “Listen, you’re being really unfair-”

“I’M BEING UNFAIR?” Tom bellowed suddenly, eyes flashing. She didn’t dare to tell him that he was scaring her. She struggled to breathe.

“You’re not giving me a cha-”

“Not to mention the fact that you’ve avoided the most important question in my letter – why were people staring at us? How many other things have you not told me?” he snarled at her.

“Please-”

“I’ve told you everything! All these HUGE things that I would never dare to tell anyone – and I told you. And firstly, you go and tell other people-”

“I didn’t, I-” Ginny stammered.

“-and secondly, you don’t feel like telling me anything. I know hardly anything about you-”

“You know everything that there is to know!” Ginny shouted. This was so unreasonable! He wasn’t even giving her a chance to make her point.

“I just can’t-”

“Look, I LOVE YOU!” Ginny exploded. “I said I’m sorry, and I honestly am, but this is just being stupid, going on and on when it’s not my fault! If you must know, I was with him because I was upset and I needed a hug, and he took advantage of it. And something that you should know is that I was upset about YOU, BECAUSE I LOVE YOU.” Her tears were mixed – of fear and of sorrow and of fury now.

Tom looked confused. “Why would you be-”

“I – I thought that you’d give me a chance, let me explain!” Ginny screamed. “Indirectly, this is your own fault! If you weren’t so paranoid and insecure and jealous all the time, then maybe you wouldn’t be losing me!”

“I thought I knew you,” Tom said, his voice soft and venomous, and Ginny realised that her last remark had been way below the belt.

Ginny hugged herself, glaring at him. “I’ve never known you.”

Tom was breathing hard. She waited for him to say something, or to do something, but all that he was doing was inhaling – exhaling – rapidly and deeply. She began to worry that he was having a panic attack.

“Are you okay?” she asked anxiously.

And then she noticed that his hands were shaking furiously – his eyes darkening –

Eyes widening, Ginny backed away.

Oh crap oh crap oh crap.

Why was it that her nightmares always became reality? It really wasn't very fair.

Oh crap oh CRAP.

He was almost bent double, holding his stomach, shuddering, shaking, twitching, blurring-

"Tom?" she whispered fearfully.

The eighteen-year-old male straightened up.

Ginny's heart stopped in her chest – because Tom wasn't Tom anymore.

"Tom – Tom, can you hear me?" she said, her voice barely audible over her terror. "Tom?" She'd been around him when his alter-ego struck last year, but before now it'd never actually succeeded to possess him. "Tom?"

He- it – Tom – he took a slow, steady step towards her.

It suddenly struck Ginny, in a moment of sheer terror, how tall he was, and how much stronger than her he was.

The door. Where was the door? Where was the freakin' door? She backed away, reaching behind her back for something to protect herself with, or, better still, an escape. Her fingers brushed something – she tried to grab hold of it – and then she found her back pressed up against the cold, cream-painted wall.

“I – can you hear me? Tom? Hello?” Ginny tried, choking out the words. She’d been attacked before, and bore a long scar on the inside of her fore-arm because of it. “Tom?” She pushed herself tighter against the wall.

“Yes...” said the thing in front of her, sweetly, mockingly. It’s voice was breathy, croaky, and strange. It sounded all wrong. It lifted a hand-

RUN!

Ginny whirled around and made a run for where she hoped the door was – down the hallway –

A hand grabbed her wrist and spun her back.

An involuntary shriek ripped out of her mouth. She struggled. She tried to wrench her arm away, but couldn’t. “Get off,” she yelled at him, stumbling backwards, reaching out frantically for something.

His hand moved-

CRACK.

Ginny found herself in the corner of the living room, her face burning, pain swimming through her, blood streaming down her left temple, down her cheek, onto her shoulder. The sofa was knocked over and the table was broken. She was lying in shards of glass.

Through the fog of swirling pain, she suspected that she’d been thrown across the room.

“Little girl,” sang the eerie voice that was all wrong coming from that mouth, as though he didn’t already know her name and everything about her.

Pain blurring her vision, Ginny struggled onto her hands and knees and crawled behind the fallen sofa, inching her way towards the hallway again.

“Aha!”

The sofa was suddenly spinning towards her – it knocked her hands and feet out from under her – she fell and was swept along with the heavy piece of furniture – crushed to the wall –

“Help,” she couldn’t help but gasp. “Tom – please – help me-”

But he couldn’t hear her, he couldn’t see her, he was locked inside himself, struggling to get out, while this parasite controlled him...

She twisted her head sideways with difficulty and saw the kitchen nearby. The kitchen, complete with defensive equipment. She didn’t want to kill Tom – oh God no – but she had to help herself. Otherwise he’d kill her.

The redhead squirmed around the edge of the sofa, clambered to her feet, and sprinted to the kitchen. It was one of those kitchens with two entrances, one from either side. Ginny raced through the left side, and clawed through drawers and scratched the counters for something – anything –

Her fingers curled around the smooth black handle of a cheese knife-

“I’ve found you...”

Ginny spun to face him, stumbled, fell against the wall...

He leant over her –

And she stabbed the cheese knife into his knee.

A loud gasp of pain.

He grabbed the counter for support as his legs buckled.

And when the tall figure looked up at her, it was Tom’s face she saw.

It was awful, watching his expression change. At first it was just confused... then he saw the sofa, on its side by the wall... the broken

glass... the knife, embedded deep in his knee... and her, collapsed against the wall, covered in bruises, glass, and blood...

"Oh God," he whispered, horror twisting his face. "Oh... God." He stared at her, dismayed. He seemed to be in shock. He reached down and, with some difficulty, tugged the knife out his knee. Blood started to pour freely down his leg.

Ginny wanted to get up and tell him that everything was okay, but she couldn't because it hurt too much, and also... everything wasn't okay. Tom had a knife dug into his knee. She was bleeding copiously from her temple. His apartment was a mess. She was still scared, even though he was himself now. And he had it on his conscience that he'd tried to kill his girlfriend.

"I- I -" Tom stammered. "I – oh God." His hands were shoved into his hair, curled around the tresses in fists so tight that blood was trickling through his fingers. Then, with nothing else to say, not even caring that he was bleeding badly, he dropped the cheese knife with a clatter on the floor tiles and staggered out of the apartment.

She was left in a mess of a house, a mess of a person, standing in broken glass.

xxx

A/N: YAYYYY! ANGST! DO THE ANGST-DANCE! I don't know why, but I adore angst almost more than I love fluff. Almost. If you review, I won't have an angry redhead stab you with a cheese knife. :D

Next Time:

"Terby, get the hell away from me before I rip you into pieces and make a shish-kebab out of you," Ginny snarled. It was all his fault. Stupid, mind-reading Bernard.

A horrible thought hit her.

He could read minds.

Did he know...?

Xxx

Chapter Thirteen: Rationally Afraid

Ginny wanted to get up and tell him that everything was okay, but she couldn't because it hurt too much, and also... everything wasn't okay. Tom had a knife dug into his knee. She was bleeding copiously from her temple. His apartment was a mess. She was still scared, even though he was himself now. And he had it on his conscience that he'd tried to kill his girlfriend.

"I- I -" Tom stammered. "I – oh God." Then, with nothing else to say, not even caring that he was bleeding badly, he dropped the cheese knife with a clatter on the floor tiles and staggered out of the apartment. She was left in a mess of a house, a mess of a person, standing in broken glass.

xxx

Unluckily, when Ginny stumbled through the doors of the Hogwarts Entrance Hall, the first person that she saw was Heather Tristanebury. The first-year saw blood and shrieked, staggering backwards, eyes wide. "She's going to kill me!" she cried out.

Ginny didn't answer. She shoved past Heather and moved as quickly as she could towards the dungeons. She couldn't see Madam Royce about this. She couldn't see Alden either, because he knew. She needed Grace.

The first words out of Grace's mouth were, "Oh my God!"

Alden noticed, and looked shocked, but before anyone could say anything – every Slytherin in the common room had their attention caught – Ginny dragged the brunette down to their dormitory and locked the door so that none of their other room-mates could burst in. Then she silenced the door, so that nosy Claude, Ramira and Avani could listen in.

"What happened?" Grace gasped.

"Nothing," Ginny lied, even though it was obviously not nothing. "Can you fix it?"

“Well, of course,” said Grace, peering at the cut. She wanted to be a Healer in St. Mungoes’ when she was older, and was the best in the class at the Healing Charms that they had been learning for several weeks. “It’s not deep... it looks like the skin burst on some sort of impact... and then you have a cut on your cheek which doesn’t look very neat...” She pulled out her wand to get to work. “Did you fall on something?”

“Yeah, why?”

Grace held up a shard of glass, raising her eyebrows.

Ginny grimaced sheepishly.

“So, are you going to tell me what happened, or am I going to have to presume that Riddle’s a woman-beater?” Grace asked wryly as she wiped off blood and began to Charm the skin back together.

“He didn’t hit me,” Ginny said. Technically, this was true. It hadn’t been Tom who sent her flying across the apartment; it had been his evil alter-ego. “I got mugged on the way home.”

“How? Didn’t you Apparate?”

“No, there were too many Muggles in the apartment block. I had to find a secluded alleyway to Apparate in, but it wasn’t as secluded as I thought. A Muggle attacked me.”

Not a bad lie, actually, Ginny thought proudly.

“How did he or she beat you up so badly?” Grace frowned. “Couldn’t you just use your wand?”

“Firstly, he was a Muggle, so I wasn’t allowed to, and secondly, I couldn’t reach it. He had me pinned – ouch!” Ginny yelled as Grace poked the wound with her wand. “What was that for?”

“Not quite healed,” Grace mused. “Leave it for a couple of days. I’ll put a bandage on it so that you don’t forget and accidentally hit it or something.”

“Okay.” Ginny cast a charm on it so that it was water-resistant, and then headed towards the bathroom to shower. “If anyone asks, I slipped on a patch of mud and hit my head on a rock,” she told Grace before she slipped into the shower stall.

Worries were going through her head. Bernard could read her mind. Someone hated her enough to cause a huge rift in her and Tom’s relationship. She’d said that Tom was losing her. He’d tried to kill her. And worst of all... this could happen whenever they had an argument.

She kept thinking of how she’d realised the actions in her bad dream at Tom’s apartment. It had been like she’d seen into the future... just like last year. She was beginning to wonder if she was part Seer.

Fifteen minutes and a lot of hot water later, Ginny dried her short hair on a fluffy towel and headed out to the Slytherin common room.

“Did you slip in the shower, too?” Claude called meanly across the room.

“Nice bandage,” Avani laughed.

Bernard was suddenly beside her. “Are you okay?” he asked gently.

“Terby, get the hell away from me before I rip you into pieces and make a shish-kebab out of you,” Ginny snarled. It was all his fault. Stupid, mind-reading Bernard.

A horrible thought hit her.

He could read minds.

Did he know...?

Bernard leaned closer. “Do I know what?” he whispered.

Ginny turned and hurried out of the common room, running out of the dungeons as fast as she could, where hopefully he couldn't see into her head anymore.

Did he know about Tom?

xxx

In Potions, Scott sat beside Ginny.

"Hey," he said casually, smiling at her. "Can I be your partner for today?"

"Er." She frowned and glanced behind her. Alden was with his girlfriend, Philippa Decrow, who was also very clever, and good at Potions. "Sure."

Scott unpacked his Potions ingredients and his notebook. Ginny couldn't help but notice that as Professor Slughorn went through the lesson's instructions, Scott was sitting very close to her, his elbow touching her side. Back off, she mentally told him, but didn't dare to say it aloud in case Slughorn told her off for talking. The old Potions-master hated her guts and would love any excuse to give her a detention.

As they began to heat the water in the cauldron, Scott asked, "So how are you?"

She glanced warily at him. "I'm fine." She tipped frog's legs into the water and watched as they bubbled as dissolved, giving off a pearly green steam.

"What happened to your head?" Scott adjusted the temperature and stirred it a few times.

"Nothing." Ginny was becoming suspicious of the Ravenclaw. She stood to get a bezoar from the store cupboard. He followed. "I slipped and hit my head, that's all."

“Oh, okay.” Scott collected an armful of boomslang skin and, once they’d returned to their desk, began to cut it up into thin strips. “So how’s Riddle? I heard that you went to see him yesterday.”

Okay, something’s definitely up.

Ginny folded her arms and stared at him. “He’s fine, too,” she said sharply. “Why do you ask? Last time I checked, you didn’t give a damn about him.”

“No reason.” He scooped up the boomslang strips and dumped them in the cauldron. “So... you’re still together, then?”

Instantly, everything clicked together. Ginny stared at the Ravenclaw next to her. “It was your memory, wasn’t it?” she said flatly.

“No.” Scott went red.

It was. Otherwise he would have said, ‘what memory?’

“Why – why – the hell would you do that?” Ginny hissed furiously. The potion went unnoticed, spluttering blue bubbles behind her. “What is your problem?”

“He had a right to know,” said Scott defensively.

“Yeah, he does! And how did you know that I wasn’t going to tell him myself?” Ginny snapped. “I am this close to blowing this cauldron up in your face.”

“I’m sorry...” He sighed. “I just... had this silly hope that maybe Riddle would curse Terby into hospitalisation or something... and then you two would break up... and then maybe I could have you,” he confessed quietly.

Ginny’s lips thinned, pressing together tightly into a line. “Scott, I’m going to say this very nicely. I know that you think that you... love me... but if you ever interfere again, then I am going to take your precious little heart and break it into tiny pieces.”

“You can’t if it’s already broken,” Scott muttered, turning back to the potion to calm the bubbles and add newts’ eyes.

xxx

When Ginny walked out of Potions with Alden, Philippa and Scott (she was making an effort to be nice to him, despite instinct screaming for her to shred him and feed him to the sheep), an owl flew into her face.

“Agh!” she yelled, falling backwards.

Scott and Alden both attempted to catch her, but she fell straight past their arms and landed, hard, on the stone floor.

“Slip again?” Avani sneered cruelly. “Careful, Peregrine – mind your forehead!”

Ginny scowled at the other seventh-year Slytherin girl, and then clambered to her feet.

The owl that had startled her was perched on a lantern, swinging precariously, yet looking at ease. It cooed at her, blinking wide amber eyes, and dropped a coil of parchment, just like the one that she’d received yesterday – tiny, thin... it was worrying.

“Thanks,” she told the bird, and as it swooped away, she unfolded the parchment.

I need your help. Now.

Panic flooded her system. What had happened?

“What does Riddle say?” Alden asked interestedly, noticing the paper in her hands. Then he saw her pale face. “Is everything okay?”

Ginny swallowed. “I have to go again,” she mumbled. “Sorry. I’ll see you later.”

“How long will you be gone?” Scott asked, jealousy flaring in his handsome brown eyes.

“I don’t know.” She pushed a hand through her cropped red hair. “If a teacher asks or something, say... say I’m sick. Or say I have to visit my family. Or whatever. Please? Thank you so much.”

Philippa, who Ginny was growing to like a lot, gave Ginny’s a quick hug, smiling warmly. Scott didn’t move; just stared at her. Alden grimaced – he suspected what was going on with Tom at the moment.

“Okay, bye,” she said, and then fled from the dungeons, hurrying across the Hogwarts grounds, hoping that no-one would notice that one of the students was escaping when she was supposed to be going to classes.

She crossed the border for the Forbidden Forest – off the grounds – and then Apparated.

Now that she knew where he lived, Ginny could simply pop into existence in front of his door. There was someone watching, however, when she arrived. A small blonde-haired boy with a dummy in his mouth, holding a tricycle, stared at her in shock. Then he wailed “Mummy” and ran down the corridor, his three-wheeled bike bumping behind him.

Yeah, well, screw you.

The now-eighteen-year-old knocked on the wooden door, emblazoned with 21-5D. Almost immediately, it swung open. She stepped through and closed it behind her with a quiet click.

“Hello?” she called, looking around the apartment. It was tidy now, and looked normal. “Are you here?”

“...Yes.”

He was sitting on the sofa, bent forwards with his head in his hands. He didn’t look up to greet her.

Ginny crossed the room and perched on the brown sofa next to him. "Hello," she said brightly, hoping that her enthusiasm would cheer him up.

Through his hands, Tom's eyes flickered to her, and she saw such an amount of raw emotion that she almost fell off the sofa. However, she held his gaze. Then he glanced up at the bandage on her head, and the pain in his eyes increased. He lifted his face from his hands and said quietly, "I went into Camden yesterday before I had time to calm down."

She nodded, feeling a fearful worry sink through her veins like ice.

"I... I was given an assignment to do by Mr. Flourish, to go and get some books from someone there... and I was still... still distressed... and I-I-" he tried to speak, his voice strangled.

"What did you do?" Ginny whispered.

Tom heaved a sigh, looking up at the ceiling. "I'm not going to give you the precise details, but..." He swallowed. "...but..." He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "...but twenty-five people are dead now."

Her breath stopped in her throat.

She said, "Oh my God" before she could stop herself, then realised that she was being tactless, and tried to force her fear away. "I'm so sorry – it's my fault."

"No – it was just... I was just upset. I mean, I got that memory, and then you started shouting at me, and then when I turned back into me again afterwards I saw that I'd tried to kill you... and I was just so..." He whispered the next word, as though it was something terrible: "...afraid." He looked away; ashamed.

"It's alright to be scared of some things," Ginny comforted him. "Being scared of this is okay. Whereas I have some totally irrational fears, like I have a phobia of green-apple stickers. I just don't like them at

all.” She smiled encouragingly, trying to get him to smile too at her stupid phobia.

“This is different, Ginevra,” Tom said quietly, “because this time there were witnesses. About a thousand of them – including police. Most of them Muggle... a few Wizards. At least one person who knows me.”

Ginny put one arm around him and then held his hand. “It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay,” he snarled, but a sort of resignation came over him as he slumped back into the cushion of the sofa, slightly squashing Ginny’s arm behind his back. “Myrtle – no-one would suspect a student, anyway. Professor Vander – he was a great teacher, why would anyone in the school target him? Even Amaris Malkin – she was wandering around in alley-ways by herself as it started to get dark; anyone could have attacked her. I can’t escape this time.”

She longed so much to say something to make him feel better, but being perfectly honest... there wasn’t anything that she could say. Anything that could comfort him was a lie, and that would just build false hopes that could only later be shattered.

She leant her head on his shoulder. “Do you want some food?” she asked. “But then again, I can’t cook, so I’ll probably poison you...” she frowned.

“It’s the thought that counts,” Tom quoted wearily. “Thank you, but I’m fine.”

“Kay, then. We can just sit here.” Ginny shrugged. “That’s enough a whirlwind of fun for me.”

“Ginevra, I... I didn’t mean what I said... yesterday...” he said, his voice so quiet that she could barely hear him.

“Neither did I.” She fidgeted with her fingers, twisting them sideways and making fists on top of his hands that she held. “And... um... sorry that I stabbed you with a cheese knife.”

“That was nothing,” Tom muttered darkly, his eyes darting up to the big white bandage on her forehead, before staring down at the floor again. “I threw you across the room.”

“Ah, I’m fine. Happens all the time. I share a dormitory with Grace, after all.” She grimaced jokingly, though that twist of her face made her skin pull, and it hurt the healing wound on her head. She tried not to let him see that it was hurting her, but he could probably see right through her anyway.

There was a silence. She hated it. Silences left Tom to his own thoughts; thoughts where he could wallow in misery and drown in his fears and insecurities.

Ginny sat up, removing – with difficulty – her arm from around his thin shoulders. She smiled cheerfully at him. “So where am I sleeping?” she chirped.

Tom blinked, looking slightly startled. “What-” His brow furrowed. “Are you staying here?”

“Mm-hm.” She bobbed her head in response. “You need me right now.”

“Oh. Okay.” He looked slightly puzzled as to why she was telling him what he needed, but didn’t ask any questions. “Then... you can use my bedroom, if you want, and I’ll just use the sofa.”

“Cool.”

xxx

Ginny went to bed early, as that meant that there would be less time awake for uncomfortable pauses. Also, she got the impression that even if she wasn’t, Tom was really tired.

It must be all that being possessed that drains the energy right out of you, she thought, but that was cruel and in poor taste, and she felt bad.

The pillow smelt of eau de Tom. Sandalwood and ink. It was weird... but nice. She curled up tight, buried her face in, and closed her eyes, blissfully at ease despite all the things that she had to worry about.

She didn't remember falling asleep, but she must have, because she opened her eyes, seemingly only seconds later, to find that it was suddenly very dark and that the clock on the wall had moved on an hour and a half.

What woke me up?

She twisted around to see what had woken her, and saw the silhouette of Tom standing awkwardly in the doorway. "Er." He rarely used abbreviations or non-existent words like 'er' and 'um', which meant that something was getting at him. Usually nervousness. "You don't, er, mind, do you, if I-" the rest of his words jumbled together in his usual fast, anxious ramble. She didn't really understand what he was saying, but she caught words like sofa and platonic and got the general drift.

"Yeah, sure." She yawned. "You don't need to ask... it's your bed."

He didn't answer. She turned back around, but felt the other side of the mattress sink slightly, and knew that she was no longer alone.

"Goodnight," Ginny mumbled sleepily. "I do have to warn you, though, I'm a snuggly sort of person." She gestured towards the pillow, currently cradled tightly in her arms. "If I invade your personal space, just push me off the edge of the bed. I don't really mind."

"Alright," came the quiet response. "Goodnight."

Just before her eyes fluttered closed, she swore she heard, 'I love you', but she was already half-asleep, so it might have been part of a dream starting early.

xxx

A/N: Aww. I thought that was so sweet. It kind of evens out nicely, doesn't it? He tosses her into a glass cupboard, she stabs him with a

cheese knife. I'll give you a sneak preview – she does invade his personal space. Hehe. But nothing fluffy happens, sadly. Because he's asleep. Aw. Too bad. Anyway. Review, and you get a young fictional Dark Lord of your choice to invade the personal space of! :D

Next Time:

The front door was flung off its hinges, splinters flying in all directions, and Aurors swarmed through the hallway.

It was so sudden, so alarming, that Ginny was standing in the kitchen, frozen, clutching a frying pan and a spatula, staring in shock at the Aurors now crowding into the living room, wands pointed. Then she kicked into action.

“Tom!” she cried, dropping the frying pan with a clatter.

xxx

Haha, me and my friend are obsessed with Tom – we were playing cards with these Harry Potter cards, and they were from the second movie, so it had Tom on them, and the whole point of the game changed... if you had Tom, you started. If you had Tom, you won. If you could find Tom, then you were in the lead. Heh, it was brilliant.

Chapter Fourteen: Blackmail Bears and Bacon, Oh My!

"I... I was given an assignment to do by Mr. Flourish, to go and get some books from someone there... and I was still... still distressed... and I-I-" he tried to speak, his voice strangled. Tom heaved a sigh, looking up at the ceiling. "I'm not going to give you details, but..." He swallowed. "...but..." He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "...but twenty-five people are dead now."

"Goodnight," Ginny mumbled sleepily. "I do have to warn you, though, I'm a snuggly sort of person." She gestured towards the pillow, currently cradled tightly in her arms. "If I invade your personal space, just push me off the edge of the bed. I don't really mind." Just before her eyes fluttered closed, she swore she heard, 'I love you', but she was already half-asleep, so it might have been part of a dream starting early.

xxx

When she woke up, Ginny was embarrassed to find that she'd rolled over two thirds of the mattress, squished herself up against the sleeping Tom, and cuddled his elbow tightly. Smiling sheepishly, she untangled herself from him and edged away.

He was still snoring quietly, and he looked so peaceful sprawled out, without a care in the world under those sleeping eyelids, so Ginny didn't disturb him. She rolled off the bed and trotted quietly through to the living room.

It was as perfectly tidy as it had been last evening. She decided that he must be obsessive-compulsive about having things neat and perfect, because otherwise it was quite unnatural.

She routed through the kitchen cupboards to find something for her complaining stomach; she found the cheese knife, and shame fired through her, remembering how she'd plunged it into his knee only a couple of days ago. Fairly quickly, she located a box of cornflakes and picked her way through them without trying to find any milk. This kitchen was too complicated for her.

Just as she was thinking, I should probably stop eating these, I've had loads, her fingers brushed the bottom of the box. She gave a guilty start, and then looked up to notice Tom emerging through the door across the apartment.

'Morning, sunshine,' she said brightly. "Cornflakes?" She held up the box, even though there was hardly anything left in it. The pitiful quantity of cornflakes left inside shook, letting him know how much of a pig she'd been before he'd woken up.

"Did you eat all of those?" Tom frowned incredulously.

Ginny peered into the packet. "No... there's about ten left."

He sighed, and moved to burrow around in his kitchen for his own food. As he did this, Ginny hopped out of her stool and moved to hunt around the apartment. In the hallway, by the door, was a copy of the Daily Prophet. She picked it up and glanced at the front page.

TWENTY-FIVE MUGGLES KILLED IN LONDON – WIZARD SUSPECTED RESPONSIBLE

At about three o'clock yesterday, twenty-five Muggles were brutally murdered in Camden, London, in the middle of the market. No-one was at the scene, though Muggle autopsies have suggested that no weapon was used. This implies that a wizard or witch is responsible, as a Muggle would not have been able to disappear so quickly. The Ministry of Magic has taken control of the situation, but is refusing to say anything. None of the Ministry authorities have agreed to say anything at present about the case, but we do have statements from some of -- continued page 5

She tried to get rid of the newspaper, but she didn't have her wand with her – it was on the coffee table. She moved towards her wand, hoping to either Banish or simply set fire to the Prophet, but as she came into view of the kitchen, Tom noticed her.

"What are you doing?"

Ginny swallowed. “Nothing,” she said cheerily, tucking the paper behind her back.

“What’s that?” Tom called, closing a cupboard door. “Let me see.”

Desperately, she reached out for her wand, but she hadn’t taken into account how fast he walked, and before her fingers had even closed on the wood, the newspaper was snatched away. “Hey!” she protested, trying to grab it back, but he held it above his head.

She hated being short.

Tom unfolded the Daily Prophet, still holding it too high for her to get it back, and she had to watch, cringing, as his face fell. “Oh.” He stared at the headline for a couple of seconds. Then he dropped it on the floor, not bothering to pick it up, and walked swiftly back into the kitchen. She heard the thump as he kicked a wall.

I shouldn’t have even picked the stupid newspaper up.

“You okay?” she asked softly, following him to where he was leaning on a counter and glaring darkly at the floor.

“No.”

“Okay. Me neither, really. I don’t feel very well. Maybe I had too many cornflakes.” An idea hit her. “Hey, I’ll make you the damn most cheerful breakfast you’ve ever seen, to make you feel better. How does that sound? And if it’s poisonous, you can’t complain, because I never said that the food would be edible, did I?” she teased.

As she bustled around attempting to fry bacon and eggs, she told him to go and sit down so that he wasn’t in the way. He sat in the living-room, absent-mindedly drumming a rhythm on the coffee table with his fingertips.

Ginny took great pride in arranging sloppy fried eggs as eyes, and then she headed for the frying bacon to make them into a smiling mouth. They looked a bit burnt when she poked them with her spatula, but she was sure that it would be fine-

BANG.

The front door was flung off its hinges, splinters flying in all directions, and Aurors swarmed through the hallway.

It was so sudden, so alarming, that Ginny was standing in the kitchen, frozen, clutching a frying pan and a spatula, staring in shock at the Aurors now crowding into the living room, wands pointed. Then she kicked into action.

“Tom!” she cried, dropping the frying pan with a clatter. Burnt bacon slid across the floor, leaving trails of sunflower oil behind them. She leapt over the bacon and pan and rushed towards where members of the Ministry of Magic were grabbing a stunned Tom and wrestling him to the ground.

“Tom Marvolo Riddle, you are under arrest by the Ministry of Magic for the vicious murder of twenty-five presently un-named Muggles. You have the right to remain silent; anything you say and do can be used against you in court,” one of them barked, evidently having said these words a thousand times.

“Tom!” she yelled, running across towards him, but a broad-shouldered Auror grabbed her and held her back.

“I’m sorry, but the Ministry forbids you from being any more involved in this situation,” he grunted.

She twisted away. “TOM!”

At the sound of his voice, Tom looked up at her from where he was squashed to the floor. His face was smooth, as though he really couldn’t give a damn for being arrested and taken away, but his eyes screamed defeat and fear. Then a crack filled the air as he, and the five Aurors pinning him down, Apparated away.

“NO – you stupid, unfair, morons!” Ginny hollered. The broad Auror finally let her go, gave her an apologetic sort of look, and then he, too, Apparated.

She slumped to the ground, staring at the spot where her boyfriend had just been.

Maybe if she stayed here long enough, totally motionless, then nothing would have happened. Tom would still be sitting on the sofa, waiting for his 'cheerful' breakfast. The bacon would still be burning in the pan, as opposed to on the floor. And she wouldn't feel this burning emptiness now that he was going to be tried in court for murder.

However, the floor grew cold, and she stood. She cleaned up the mess in the kitchen, gave one last sad look at the empty apartment, and then took a handful of Floo powder from beside the small fire-grate, transporting herself quickly back to the Slytherin common room.

It was mostly empty, apart from a couple of startled-looking third-years.

"Sorry," she told them, and stumbled away to the seventh-year girls' dormitory, where she could curl up and stare bleakly at the wall, listening to her breathing against the still silence of the unoccupied room.

Grace and Flora came back to the dormitory about forty-five minutes later, chatting at length about something trivial. Flora noticed the redhead first. She gasped, "Ginny!", totally cutting off her and Grace's conversation.

"Ginny," Grace exclaimed, swooping across the room like an oversized, clumsy bird. She sat on the edge of her bed. "Ohmigod, Slughorn practically flipped when he thought you were gone, but we managed to persuade him that you were in the bath and just taking ages because you were brushing your eyebrows or something-

"Thanks," Ginny muttered.

"-and then this morning, he went ape again, because I tried to tell him that you were in the bath again, and he went, "again?" and I went, "uh, yeah, she's really big on hygiene and stuff" but he totally didn't

believe me, so I gave this big sigh and went, "okay, sir, I confess, she's not in the bath, she's out seeing some guy from Gryffindor which I totally don't approve of, but anyway she went out about ten minutes ago to snog him somewhere" and you could tell, in his head, he was like, whoa, way too much information, but he didn't ask anything else, he just sort of grunted and left." Grace finished this babbled explanation with a whoosh of breath taken in, having not breathed for the whole of her speech. "So yeah."

"Where were you?" Flora asked curiously, sitting on her own bed and picking up a glossy magazine. "We have five minutes until Transfiguration, by the way, so you'd better get your stuff."

"Family stuff," Ginny lied, reluctantly getting up and collecting together her schoolbooks.

Flora frowned. "I thought that all of your family was... um... you know. Dead."

A lie quickly formed in Ginny's brain. "Exactly." She gave the blonde an oh my God how could you be so insensitive look, before giving a big sniff and saying, "My brother's body was recovered from the Irish Sea."

"Oh." She went pink. "I'm really sorry."

"Yeah, well so am I." Ginny slung her schoolbag onto her shoulder. "Let's go."

Flora, obviously feeling embarrassed, hurried ahead to talk to one of her friends from Ravenclaw, Elizabeth. Grace then turned to Ginny, eyebrows raised.

"So," she said, stretching the word into three syllables. "What's up?"

Ginny didn't answer. She hugged herself tightly, scratching vaguely at her schoolbag strap where it was digging into her shoulder with the weight of her books. "Um."

For some wonderful reason, Grace seemed to realise that she didn't wanted to say anything. "If you don't want to tell me, that's fine," she said kindly.

Good, she thought to herself. She couldn't explain the emptiness she felt.

Transfiguration was taken with the Hufflepuffs. Antonia Durrell, a girl from that House that Ginny was quite good friends with, smiled from across the room and gestured for the redhead to join her. Antonia and Ginny had been Prefects together last year.

"Hey," Antonia said. "I haven't talked to you since school started – how are you doing?"

"I'm okay," Ginny said slowly, unpacking the books that she would need. "How about you?"

"Urgh, same as always. Little sister misbehaving, trying to get a guy to notice that I exist, failing Divination – nothing new." She grimaced. "What's up? Quidditch doing alright? How's Riddle – I heard you were still together."

"Please open your books to page three-hundred-and-twenty-one," said Dumbledore, scratching out letters on the blackboard.

Ginny flipped through the pages. "Alden's little brother was hit by a Bludger, so we're postponing the next match to see if he's going to get better within two months... and if not, then we'll have to replace him," she said, her eyes flicking across the page they were set to see what they'd be studying.

More human-Transfiguration.

"And... yeah, I'm still with Tom. He's – he's okay." Ginny chewed the tip of her quill.

"What's happening with you and Scott?" she wiggled her eyebrows. "I hear things."

Sighing, Ginny felt an urge to tell the truth. "Scott thinks that he's in love with me, and he's being really stubborn about trying to get me to admit I like him too, which obviously isn't working, because I don't... a sixth-year, Bernard Terby, made a move on me, and Scott was watching... he sent the memory of me and Terby to Tom, because he thought that it would break us up-"

Antonia winced.

"-and though it didn't work, Tom's not really the happiest person right now," she finished wearily.

"Ouch," said Antonia sympathetically. "Oh! I know. Why don't you-"

"Miss Durrell – Miss Peregrine – the exercise began five minutes ago and I haven't seen you do a single thing yet," Dumbledore called sternly from the front of the classroom.

"Sorry, sir," the two girls chorused, and got to work.

The task set was to Transfigure other people. They were working now on becoming animals – only temporarily, however, instead of being Animagi. Ginny's memory flashed back to the Sorting of Minerva McGonagall, and smiled.

Everyone else was focusing on growing fur, or claws, and roaring at each other playfully like monsters. Ginny couldn't think of what animal to attempt. Antonia was trying to become a bear. What should she do? A fox, like her Patronus? No.

An image came to her head.

An eagle, the most magnificent and massive eagle the world had ever seen. It flew out of the window, across lakes and mountains, to the Ministry of Magic... swooped down, smashed down walls and gates with its mighty wings... snatched up Tom... and flew away into the sunrise...

That was stupid, though, because even if she did become a bird, then she wouldn't be able to fly, much less carry Tom away. However, her

decision had been made, and she made it a personal project to learn how to become a bird.

xxx

She was walking away from Arithmancy where he cornered her.

“Hey!” Ginny yelled as Bernard grabbed her arms, twisted her through a tapestry, and pushed her into a corner where she couldn’t escape. Instantly, she grabbed her wand and pointed it between his eyes. “Don’t you dare try any funny business.”

“Funny?” Bernard smiled suavely. “How’s this for funny, doll? I have a deal to make you.”

“I’m listening.” Ginny didn’t lower her wand, nor did she relax her grip on it. She kept the words *vermum nez* at the front of her mind – the incantation for her infamous Bat-Bogey Hex.

“Okay, I was thinkin’... that if you agreed, voluntarily, o’ course, to go out with me...” Bernard said softly, maliciously, “then maybe I wouldn’t tell the world what your pathetic lil’ boyfriend is.”

She stared at him in disgust. “And to think that I used to like you,” she spat. “You know what the only thing is that’s stopping me from hexing the inside of your nose to attack you? The fact that I want to tell you something very important... almost always, the way to get a girl to like you isn’t blackmail. Whereas, if you’d asked me out, maybe a year ago, when I was still single and I still foolishly thought that you were decent, I might have agreed. But now,” she jabbed her wand-tip into the bridge of his nose, “I’m taken, and I just think you’re a freak!”

“You don’t mean that, darlin’,” Bernard drawled.

“Oh, yeah, I think I do,” Ginny said fiercely. “And if you want to keep the more delicate regions of your anatomy intact, then I suggest you never come anywhere near me again.”

Bernard stepped closer, gently pushing her wand aside so that it didn't hit him in the face. "I don't believe that I'll be able to do that, doll," he breathed.

"VERMUS NEZ!" Ginny yelled, whipping her wand back around.

Bright green light lit the dark secret-tunnel that they were standing, burning the image of Bernard onto her retinas for a couple of seconds before she regained her sense and fled the scene where a sixth-year was holding his face and writhing in pain.

Whatever happened to roses and chocolates, Ginny thought sadly as she made her way towards Muggle Studies – but that reminded her of yellow primroses and poems and other silly romantic things that had happened last year, and that made her the hole in her heart swell and sting.

xxx

A/N: What I found hilarious for the last chapter was how in a review, storm-brain wrote ninety-three 'crap's after she saw the preview. XD Yes, I counted. No, I don't really have a life. And also, I'm going to be pathetic and try to get you to read my song parodies fic, as I've done one for Voldie and Evil!Tom. Teehee. I'm so transparent. Please review!

Next Time:

Ginny knew what was wrong the instant that she stepped into the Great Hall the next morning for breakfast.

Everyone – and she meant everyone – including teachers – turned to stare at her in shock and disbelief. And everyone was clutching an issue of the Daily Prophet.

xxx

OOH. Scandalous.

I love that word.

SCANDAL! Hahaha. Sorry, I'm being childish.

SCANDAL!

HAHAHAHHAHA.

Chapter Fifteen: Hold Onto Hope

“Tom Marvolo Riddle, you are under arrest by the Ministry of Magic for the vicious murder of twenty-five presently un-named Muggles. You have the right to remain silent; anything you say and do can be used against you in court,” one of them barked, evidently having said these words a thousand times.

“Okay, I was thinkin’... that if you agreed, voluntarily, o’ course, to go out with me...” Bernard said softly, maliciously, “then maybe I wouldn’t tell the world what your pathetic lil’ boyfriend is.”

Bright green light lit the dark secret-tunnel that they were standing, burning the image of Bernard onto her retinas for a couple of seconds before she regained her sense and fled the scene where a sixth-year was holding his face and writhing in pain. Whatever happened to roses and chocolates, Ginny thought sadly as she made her way towards Muggle Studies – but that reminded her of yellow primroses and poems and other silly romantic things that had happened last year, and that made her the hole in her heart swell and sting.

xxx

Ginny knew what was wrong the instant that she stepped into the Great Hall the next morning for breakfast.

Everyone – and she meant everyone – including teachers – turned to stare at her in shock and disbelief. And everyone was clutching an issue of the Daily Prophet.

Grace’s mouth was wide open in astonishment. Flora and Philippa were staring. Claude, Avani and Ramira were whispering. Scott stared. Bernard glared. The teachers looked half-amazed, half-horrified. Heather Tristanebury looked like she was on the verge of tears. Only Alden looked sympathetic.

Pretending that she didn’t care, Ginny walked across the room to the Slytherin table, the furthest from the door. She took a seat beside Alden, who she knew would be okay with this even if everyone else wasn’t.

“Good morning,” she said cheerfully, taking a slice of toast. Taking a bite out of it, she reached over Alden to take an edition of the Daily Prophet from where it was lying next to his plate.

No-one moved their gazes for her, waiting for her reaction.

She unfolded the paper and glanced at the headline. Judging by what everyone was doing, she already knew what it said.

MAN BEING TRIED FOR MUGGLE MASSACRE

The United Kingdom was shaken a few days ago when twenty-five Muggles were savagely killed in the centre of Camden Market, London. No clues were left behind, and everyone feared that they were left in the hands of a Wizarding serial killer who could never be stopped. Yet, yesterday, at about ten o'clock in the morning, murder suspect Tom Riddle was brought into the Ministry for a court trial.

“We knew almost instantly that it was him,” says Ministry official, Rafael Vestry, though he would not tell the Prophet how he knew. “All we had to do was find out where he lived, get Ministry permission to raid his living quarters, and take him in.”

Muggle autopsies on the bodies show that the killing spree was not particularly well planned, and may even have been totally spontaneous. This was a relief for the country, though it is still clear that Riddle is dangerous and needs to be taken control of..

Vestry reports, “Yes, he will tried for an Azkaban sentence.” When asked what he thought would happen if Riddle managed to worm his way out and prove innocence, he continues, “No, I don’t think that he will. The evidence is tremendous. I think it’s just a case of whether or not Riddle will be given life sentence in Azkaban. There is no doubt in any of our heads right now that he’ll be taken in for the Dementors to -- continued page 2

Ginny felt the colour drain out of her face.

Azkaban?

She hadn't thought about that. She hadn't even considered that he'd be taken away – that he'd be given to the mercy of the Dementors.

Life sentence?

She felt sick.

Everyone was still watching for her reaction.

Ginny folded the newspaper neatly, handed it back to Alden, and then calmly asked a terrified-looking fourth-year across the table from her to pass her the strawberry jam for her toast.

The silence now broken, whispers broke out, rumours forming frantically in everyone's brains and mouths. There was nothing quite like the ex-Head Boy being arrested to form gossip, was there?

"Are you okay?" Alden asked quietly, keeping his voice low so that no-one else could hear. Even Grace couldn't look at her; instead choosing to stare at her plate with a red face.

"No," said Ginny lightly. "I've just read that my boyfriend is going to be sent to prison, possibly for a life sentence. No, Alden, I'm not okay, but I think I'll manage breakfast before running away to throw myself from the Astronomy Tower."

She didn't bother to keep her voice down. Let everyone hear that she didn't give a damn, if they wanted to listen.

"Don't mind Grace. She's just not used to scandal," he teased.

Despite herself, Ginny grinned. "Thanks, Alden. It's nice to know that someone remembers that I'm not the one being sent to Azkaban, and that they can still talk to me. By the way, how's Dominic?"

Alden's face grew grave. "He hasn't woken up yet. They've taken a scan of his brain and spine, and are waiting for the results to see if he's going to be okay," he mumbled.

“I’m so sorry,” Ginny said, hugging him. “Don’t worry, though. He’ll be okay. He’s tougher than everyone thinks.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Ginny glanced across the room and saw the small, pudgy figure of Heather Tristanebury getting up to leave, unaccompanied.

“I’ll see you in Defence Against the Dark Arts,” Ginny said. “I want to talk to Heather.” She grabbed her schoolbag and followed the eleven-year-old. “Heather!” she called through the Entrance Hall, hurrying to catch up.

The small girl turned, looking frightened.

“I want to talk to you,” Ginny said. “I know that you’re just about terrified of me, but nothing that anyone says about me is true, and I feel like I need to let you know that I’m not... not... bad.” It was the best that she could come up with.

“Okay,” said Heather warily, and she sat down on one of the Entrance Hall steps to listen.

Ginny sat beside her. She cast a Silencing Charm in a bubble around them, and ignored Heather’s alarmed look. “Don’t worry. It’s just that while I think I can trust you, I can’t trust everyone else in the school, and they might listen, because I’m about to tell you everything.”

Taking a deep breath, she began with the Weasley family. She told it like a story, saying she did instead of I did, and so on. She described her parents, and her brothers, every one of them, even Percy, who honestly hadn’t felt like her sibling for a long time, even before he died. It felt weird talking about them. She hadn’t referred to any of them in almost two years. She described how Lord Voldemort had fallen, and how Harry Potter was the Boy-Who-Lived. She told Heather about meeting Harry when she was ten, before she realised who that skinny boy with glasses actually was. The diary, being possessed, having a crush on Harry, going out with Michael Corner and Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan, and even Harry, for a short time.

Then the story got gruesome.

Ginny was quite proud of her story-telling, as Heather seemed to be taking in every word, believing everything, no matter how stupid it sounded, even to Ginny's own ears.

Due to Heather only being eleven, and maybe getting nightmares or something, Ginny cut out the majority of the unpleasant details. She started crying halfway through – she hadn't cried in a long time, and felt a bit embarrassed – and was pleasantly surprised when Heather gave her an awkward little hug. Then she continued.

Soon Ginny was telling the eleven-year-old about coming to 1958, finding out about Tom – telling how much she'd hated him, telling about the mystery of the attacks, telling about how she became his friend, telling about how she discovered that he wasn't evil and it wasn't his fault... telling about how she fell in love with him. She told of going back to her own time, seeing that nothing had changed, and returning.

Now Heather was involved in the story, and she looked ashamed at having been so scared of Ginny. The tale caught up to Tom killing the people in Camden, and Heather's eyes widened with understanding.

"-and I didn't think it was fair that you should be so scared of something that you didn't even understand," Ginny finished quietly.

"It goes without saying," said Heather. She had a soft, slightly Bristol-tinged accent that suited her voice, "that I'm not supposed to tell anyone, but I want to say anyway that I'm not going to tell a soul."

"Thanks," Ginny said gratefully. "Now is there anything you want to tell me?"

She always thought that the saying a burden shared is a burden halved was stupid, but it was true. Having to hold in all of her secrets hurt, and telling someone made her feel better.

“...I want to talk to my sister,” Heather confessed quietly, “but I’m scared to.”

“Why?”

“We were never that close... and now she’s d-dead. And I’m just worried that she’s not going to be the same... and even more worried that she’s going to be exactly the same.”

“I’ll take you to see her some time,” Ginny offered. “How does that sound?”

“Alright,” said Heather happily. “I’d like that. Thanks!” She looked eagerly up at Ginny. “Are you my friend now?”

“Er, yeah, sure.”

“Yay!” Heather squealed, and it reminded Ginny that, after all, Heather and Myrtle were practically identical. She had no friends. It made her proud that she was this girl’s first friend, but also extremely sad.

xxx

The Ministry was quiet on a Wednesday evening. Most people who worked there had already gone home. Only one guard with a shiny badge and a permanent frown asked what Ginny was doing there.

“I’m here to see Tom Riddle,” she said nervously. When the guard seemed as though he wasn’t going to let her through, she brought tears to her hazel eyes and let her lower lip quiver. “Please,” she begged, “he’s all I have in the world.”

He looked slightly suspicious at first, but then he saw that she was just a sad little girl who wanted to see her friend one last time. “This way,” he grunted, and beckoned for her to follow.

They descended into darkness, down curving steps as though into dungeons. The guard fished on his belt-loop for a set of keys to unlock the door. He called for two other guards to take care of her

and make sure she didn't try to help Tom escape or something, and then returned to his post.

The two new guards that accompanied her looked fierce, and told her not to try anything. They let her through the space and then backed off to stand behind a glass door so that they could have some privacy.

"Hello?" Ginny was worried by being down here, but she needed to be here. She curled her fingers through the fence, peering in.

"Ginevra?" His voice sounded broken, and it made tears of anger for the injustice of this sting her eyes.

"Yeah, it's me," she said.

His outline appeared in the corner of the holding cell, and he stepped towards the fence, nothing more than a shadow. It was like Ginny was looking at what empty shell he would become after the Dementors were done with him.

He stood directly opposite her, his head bowed, twisting his fingers through the wire, too, holding hers as best he could while separated by a prison fence.

"Are you okay?" she whispered.

Tom chose not to answer this. The response was fairly obvious. "The trial date has been set for Friday," he said quietly. "They've decided to trust me; they're letting me out."

Her eyes widened with hope. "They're setting you free?" she exclaimed, her excitement bubbling over like a volcano. She grabbed at the nephrite necklace he'd given her, something that she always wore now, like a good-luck charm. For him.

A shake of Tom's head destroyed her happiness. "No. I'm still being tried for murder. They told me to consider it like... like enjoying my last day of freedom."

"When do they let you out?" Ginny asked, trying to remain optimistic.

He barely twitched his shoulders in a shrug, looking down at the ground.

"I'll be back in a second," she promised, untwining her fingers from his and the fence. She whirled around and hurried back to the guards. "Excuse me?"

They stared at her. What could this young girl possibly want on their night shift?

"Um, I was told that you'd be letting him out. Not releasing him from the trial, as such. Just... letting him go home," she said hopefully, biting her lip, and repeated what he'd told her. "Enjoying his last day of freedom."

The more senior of the two guards folded his arms. "Yes, someone did suggest that. We decided that this would only be the case if someone came to take him back, on the knowledge that the person who took him would have the Unbreakable Vow put upon them that they wouldn't try to help him escape," he said uninterestedly. "Is your question in the interest of temporarily bailing him?"

She swallowed. The Unbreakable Vow. Ouch. "Yeah."

"Come with us."

Ginny followed them towards an enclosed interrogation room, and was sat in a stiff wooden chair. One of them clasped her hand, muttering an incantation and pointing his wand at her. "You have consented to take Tom Marvolo Riddle on temporary bail before his trial on Friday, on the agreement that you will give us the details of where you will be, and will not try in any way to help him escape. Will you...?"

"Er, Ginevra Peregrine," she said, realising that they were waiting for her name.

"Will you, Ginevra Peregrine, agree to the aforementioned?"

"I will?" Ginny tried, not really knowing what to say.

It must have been correct, as a hot red thread spiralled from out of the tip of the guard's wand, spun tightly around his and Ginny's hands, and then faded from view.

"Very well. Can you now fill in this form as to where you'll be?"

xxx

The instant that Tom and Ginny Side-Along Apparated back to 21-5D Redrick Apartments, he stumbled towards the wall to hold onto it so that he didn't fall over.

"I'll get you some water or something," Ginny offered, and went to try and find a glass, but he was already starting to walk towards the kitchen.

He got there first, and from the tiny Muggle fridge (a fairly new invention) dragged out a Firewhiskey and collapsed onto the sofa. The action was so undignified and so unusual that it partly frightened Ginny. The defeat in every movement chilled her blood.

"Or not," she mumbled, and went to get herself a glass of water.

Holding the water carefully so that she wouldn't spill it everywhere, Ginny sat beside him. She drank a small amount before realising that she wasn't really thirsty, and put the glass down. "Um." She didn't really know what to say.

"So what do your friends think?" Tom asked randomly, taking a deep drink from the Firewhiskey bottle and having no reaction as the liquid flames hit his throat.

"What?" She blinked, startled.

"I'm presuming that my name came out in the Daily Prophet at some point," he said darkly, staring at the dark brown bottle in his hand. "What do your little friends think now?"

The 'little' stung, but she ignored it. "Alden's being really nice, because he knows and everything, and isn't really surprised... Everyone else," she declared, picking up her glass again and swirling the transparent liquid around and around, "is one great, big, unified asshole."

"Even Hartwin?" said Tom, drinking more.

"Yeah." She remembered Alden's words and chuckled dryly. "She's not used to scandal."

"I have to admit, I am slightly puzzled by how well you're taking this."

"I'm not taking it well. I'm merely pretending that I am, to make you feel better. It's clearly not working, as you're sinking into a state of depression, judging by the fact that you're having alcohol, but I think I'll keep trying anyway," Ginny commented.

Tom's eyes were fixed on the opposite wall. "You don't miss a trick, do you?"

"Not usually." She turned in her seat to look at him. "Don't worry. Everything might turn out okay. And even if it doesn't, then at least we can remember this, right?"

"You're right." Tom took one last gulp from the Firewhiskey, then set it down. "I'm being stupid." He pushed a hand backwards through his hair. "I'm just so... I don't know," he murmured. "It's like I'm standing at a great height, watching everything slip away. Watching myself lose everything that I care about." He looked intently at her. "You'll be there, won't you, for the trial?"

"Of course," Ginny told him. "I promise, no matter what happens, I'll be there." She held his hand tightly and lightly kissed his wrist. "I promise."

"Thank you," said Tom, and in his eyes it looked as though he still had hope. Ginny smiled for his pretence, though they both knew that he'd given up long ago.

xxx

A/N: Oh, it gets better – for the last chapter, I got ONE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN ‘OMFG’s from... from Jen103, I think. I’m so lame that I counted... anyway. Please review!

The next chapter is the trial... OHMIGOD... what’s going to happen... well, I know. But you don’t... OHMIGOD...

Next Time:

Breakfast was out on the table, and it made the hole in her stomach catch fire. Tom had been on his way to court, so that a group of biased people could decide to ruin his life, and he’d still thought to make her breakfast. It was so sweet and sad that it made her want to scream. Yet, she ignored it. She couldn’t eat. She felt like she was going to be sick.

xxx

Who here is twitching from anticipation?

I am.

And I know what the outcome of the trial is. XD

There’s probably something wrong with me...

Chapter Sixteen: How You Plead Will Change Your Life

"You're right." Tom took one last gulp from the Firewhiskey, then set it down. "I'm being stupid." He pushed a hand backwards through his hair. "I'm just so... I don't know. It's like I'm standing at a great height, watching everything slip away. Watching myself lose everything that I care about." He looked intently at her. "You'll be there, won't you, for the trial?"

"Of course," Ginny told him. "I promise, no matter what happens, I'll be there." She held his hand tightly and lightly kissed his wrist. "I promise."

"Thank you," said Tom, and in his eyes it looked as though he still had hope. Ginny smiled for his pretence, though they both knew that he'd given up long ago.

xxx

On Friday, Ginny woke up and he was already gone. Instantly, she felt a surge of panic. Had she overslept? Had she missed it? Oh God oh God, she'd promised that she'd be there and she'd missed it!

However, to her great relief, she found that he had left early to prepare, and that there was still half an hour before the trial started. She would be cutting it fine when she got there, but as long as she was there, that was all that mattered.

She dressed quickly and brushed her hair for once. She didn't see what she was putting on, didn't pay attention – a skirt, a shirt, a pair of shoes...

Breakfast was out on the table, and it made the hole in her stomach catch fire. Tom had been on his way to court, so that a group of biased people could decide to ruin his life, and he'd still thought to make her breakfast. It was so sweet and sad that it made her want to scream. Yet, she ignored it. She couldn't eat. She felt like she was going to be sick.

Ginny frantically checked around the apartment one more time. It wasn't as tidy as when Tom had left it, but it was good enough, and she Apparated.

The Ministry was filling with people on their way to work. She pushed through the crowds. Tom had told her that he was being tried in Court Eleven, but she couldn't find it.

Oh no oh no! Panic flooded her system again when she couldn't find the courtroom. In the end, she asked a guard – it was the same guard as the one that she'd signed the Unbreakable Vow with.

"Which way to Courtroom Eleven?" she asked desperately.

"I remember you, kid," he said. "Tom Riddle's friend. Courtroom Eleven is that way – to the end of the hall and to the right. You're not allowed through the main doors, though. You're the audience. You sit in the boxed seats above. On the left of Courtroom Eleven doors, and up the stairs. Good luck."

The guard was actually quite friendly, and Ginny liked him a lot now. She only had time, though, to shout a 'thank you' over her shoulder at him as she raced away.

She thundered up the stairs, tripping once and hurting her hand on the concrete steps. Then she was through the doors. It was already starting, and some old ladies with powdered wigs frowned at her. "Sorry," she mouthed at them, and pushed through to find a seat at the front of the box.

There he was!

He was standing tall; standing brave, and unaffected, as always. Ginny was too far to be able to look into his eyes and see if this was more than a façade, however, and as far as she could tell, he felt nothing at all.

She longed to shout his name so that he would know that she was there and feel comforted – she had an overwhelming urge to scream,

thank you for breakfast - but the seats were full now, and the judge was rising to his feet.

“We are here today to witness the trial of Tom Marvolo Riddle,” said the judge – a fat man who Ginny knew from the Daily Prophet to be the Minister for Magic, Edgar Powell.

A journalist in the corner scribbled enthusiastically on his notepad, and the jury whispered. Ginny’s palms heated up and grew damp; she clenched tight fists and bit her fingernails. Her heart throbbed underneath her jumper.

“Do you swear to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

Tom didn’t move an inch. She wondered what he was thinking. In her head she was screaming, you have to lie! You have to lie!

“I do.” The first lie.

Unless he’s not lying.

He has to lie!

“The charges are as such...” Powell shuffled some papers. “Use of magic in front of Muggles – do you plead innocent or guilty?”

Ginny’s eyes flashed back to Tom.

There was a brief pause. “Guilty.”

Hushed whispers broke out in the jury and audience. Powell held up one fat hand to silence them.

“Public murder of over twenty people, all Muggles – do you plead innocent or guilty?”

Her hand started to spasm violently. She clutched at the rail in front of her, of the balcony above the trial area, where she sat. Her knuckles

turned white. Don't you dare, she screamed at him silently. Don't you dare.

There wasn't the slightest change in his emotionless mask. "Innocent."

Her heart had been hovering dangerously above the point of a terrifyingly sharp needle, but now it floated slightly higher, safely away from the piercing end of the needle. She thanked Merlin that he had been practicing this act of lying smoothly through his teeth while keeping his face void of feeling for eighteen years.

Powell eyed him carefully. "Bring forth the questioner."

A thin woman with a face like a hawk strode smartly into view, stopping before Tom. She smoothed her full skirt and ran a hand over her hair, swept into a tight bun. Then she stared beadily forwards. "I'll start simply. What were you doing last Wednesday?"

Ginny's heart plummeted back down to the needle. She swallowed hard. She prayed that he knew what to say; she didn't. She scrabbled desperately for her nephrite necklace, clinging to it for hope.

"I was at Camden Market."

"Why were you there?"

"I work in Flourish and Blott's. I was told to go to Camden Market by Mr. Flourish because one of the shop-keepers had a store of new books that had been paid for but that had never been received."

Every word that he'd told the questioner so far was true. Ginny was so nervous that she felt like she was going to be sick, and it wasn't even her being tried! If it had been her under those harsh lights, with everyone staring at her, she would have passed out.

The questioner turned to Powell with an eyebrow raised.

"We have confirmed his alibi. He was there, and he sent there by Flourish," Powell responded. "Continue with the questioning."

“At approximately three o’clock, what were you doing?”

Tom’s jaw tightened infinitesimally. “I don’t remember.”

DAMNIT, WHY ARE YOU TELLING THE TRUTH?

“Why is this, do you think?”

DON’T ANSWER THAT TRUTHFULLY!!

“I didn’t have a watch with me.”

“Surely your wand could have sufficed?”

“I didn’t feel the need to. I had plenty of time.”

“Time for what?”

“To find the man, collect the books, and return to Mr. Flourish.”

Ginny needed a drink. Her throat was dry; she roughly licked her lips to try and maintain moisture. Her fingers couldn’t stop twitching at her neck, around the pendant she wore, that he’d given her, such a short time ago. Her head was pounding.

“What do you think you may have done at approximately three o’clock, Mr. Riddle?” was asked of him.

Her fingernails dug into her skin as she tensed again.

“I remember questioning a nearby shopkeeper, asking if he knew where to find a Mr. Zuker; asking if he knew any other shopkeepers who knew. He pointed me in the right direction and that was where I went next. That might have been around that time,” Tom replied coolly.

It was an untruth. Tom didn’t personally remember, but he knew that at three o’clock, he had been ripping Muggles to pieces.

“Are you certain?”

Those three words doomed Tom. That meant that she knew he was lying, and was giving him a chance to back himself up – and prove himself a liar, a cheater in court.

“Yes.”

She wasn't sure if this was the best answer. She wanted to help him, but firstly she didn't have anything to help him with, and secondly it was against the law.

Ginny needed to look at him, to run to him and hold him tightly, but he wouldn't even turn to meet her pleading eyes. Instead she held even more firmly onto her necklace. The metal of it cut into her fingers. Blood beaded her fingertips, but she didn't notice the pain.

“Mr. Riddle, we have evidence that proves that what you have said is untrue,” said the female questioner, smugly, almost gleefully.

Powell looked up, seeming bored. “Bring forth the evidence.” His words resounded in the fairly small trial-room.

The questioner lifted her wand. A television was Levitated in and rested on the table. Many people looked confused. “This,” she explained, though, as he was half-Muggle, Tom already knew what it was. She was mostly addressing the jury, “is a television. It's a fairly new Muggle device. You can watch things that have already happened.” Now she spoke only to Tom. “You are a half-blood, is that correct?”

“That is correct.” Tom's tone was wary, and his fingers curled into fists.

She smiled. It was more of a taunting smirk, laughing at him for being impure. “Are you aware of the new American Muggle company known as the CCTV, positioned throughout the globe and used in security to record what happens in selected areas?”

“I am aware.”

Ginny was momentarily distracted from her anxious stress by thinking, CCTV is American? Then she slid quickly back in panic-mode, gnawing at her fingernails and praying to every God of every religion, and to Merlin, and to Dumbledore, and to her parents, and to Dippet, and to Tom, that everything would be alright. That the man she loved wouldn't be sent to Azkaban for something that wasn't his fault.

"I'd like you to watch the tape, Mr. Riddle," the questioner said.

The images on the Muggle television was projected magically onto the blank wall on one side of the room, where everyone could see. The tiny television itself, however, was facing Tom and the judge, for them to watch.

Ginny's eyes danced between Tom and the film. Tom – the tape – Tom – tape – Tom – tape –

He was standing straight as he had been for so long. It was obvious though, that he was realising that he couldn't win, from the way that he was staring without blinking at the television set, his hands curled tight, his jaw set.

The film was showing a section of Camden, in London. It was the market area, and there were hundreds of shops open selling food and clothing. For a moment, nothing was happening. Then a figure appeared on the screen. The person shown was tall, lean and dark-haired. Though the face couldn't be seen, it was fairly obvious that it was Tom.

The jury began to whisper frantically.

Ginny let go of her necklace and instead clung to the banister, leaning forwards to see better.

The Tom on the screen wasn't walking towards any shops. He was standing stock-still in the centre of the market, in perfect view. Then he moved so fast that he blurred, and people started running-

Silently, the questioner stepped forwards and stopped the tape, for respect, before it began to show what he'd actually done to the civilians he'd accidentally attacked. She turned to Tom, her eyes glinting. "Do you have anything to say to this?"

Tom's lips moved slightly - the tiniest way of fidgeting uncomfortably – because clasping them together tightly. He didn't reply.

"Who is the man upon the tape?"

His lip curled, hating her smug smirk the same way that Ginny did. "I am."

"I see." She clasped her hands behind her back and walked closer to him, peering evilly up into his face with a sinister smirk. "And what do the man on the tape do next?"

Tom didn't look down at her. He stared darkly ahead, his lips thinned. "He kills a crowd of Muggles."

Her heart was on the needle now, pressing down so that it hurt her deep inside. She wanted to hug herself and rock on the floor so that she could make herself feel better. She wanted chocolate. She wanted Tom.

"Your Honour, my point has been made; you may continue as you see fit," the questioner said slyly, and slunk away, Levitating her television behind her.

Stupid television! Stupid CCTV!

Ginny didn't see a way out, but there had to be. If Tom just told them about his... problem... then maybe it'd be okay... if he just insisted his innocence... if he just explained properly...

Powell frowned. "Mr. Riddle, the case you gave to us at the beginning has just been proved false."

Tom still didn't move his eyes from the other side of the room. He didn't answer.

“Do you have anything to add to the case?” Powell enquired.

TELL THEM! TELL THEM THAT IT’S NOT YOU! TELL THEM!

“No, I don’t.”

YOU STUPID, STUPID PERSON! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

TELL THEM! TELL THEM IT’S NOT YOUR FAULT! IT’S YOUR STUPID, TWISTED UNDEAD SIBLING! WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?

“Now, this leaves us with two options. If you plead innocent, the trial shall continue. If not, then the trial shall be adjourned for a short break while the jury settles on the severity of your punishment,” Powell informed him, looking down at him through his small, square glasses. “Is that clear?”

“I understand.”

Ginny’s hands curled around the banister even more tightly, and she stood, leaning right over, as if somehow she could be there, too, closer than this.

“How do you plead?”

Now, for the first time since the trial had begun, Tom turned to her. He found her immediately. He’d obviously known all along where she was. Emotions flooded him – not his face; just his eyes, trained on hers. His face was smooth, but his eyes were on the verge of breakdown. And they were whispering to her. Whispering. Whispering. “I’m sorry,” they said.

NO!

Tom turned back to Powell.

“Guilty.”

Her heart plummeted onto the needle; the needle pushed straight through it, coming out the other side. “NO!” Ginny screamed, letting out a sound for the first time, clawing at the banister with her fingernails – screamed and screamed – and was drowned out by the echoing, final thud of the judge’s hammer falling, falling.

xxx

A/N: YAYYYY! I’m so happy! The next chapter is so unbelievably angsty! And the one after that is even angstier! And the one after that... and the one after that! YAYY! ANGST! Wahahha! I’m insane. ANGSTTTTTTTT! DO THE ANGST-DANCE! –boogeyboogey-

Next Time:

Somehow he must have guessed that she would run this way, because he was there, halfway up the stairs, and grabbed her before she could run past him.

“No!” She twisted sideways. “Let go of me,” she sobbed, beating his chest and struggling to get away.

Tom didn’t. He held her even tighter. “I’m sorry,” he whispered in her ear.

xxx

I love this song.

“Close your eyes and make believe

That this is where you want to be

Forgetting all the memories

Trying to forget love because love’s forgotten me...

Ah-ah.

Ah-ah-ah-ah.

YOU'VE NEVER BEEN USED AS I'M USING YOU
ABUSING YOU
MY LITTLE DECOY."

Chapter Seventeen: The Unbreakable Breaks

“How do you plead?”

Now, for the first time since the trial had begun, Tom turned to her. He found her immediately. He’d obviously known all along where she was. Emotions flooded him – not his face; just his eyes, trained on hers. His face was smooth, but his eyes were on the verge of breakdown. And they were whispering to her. Whispering. Whispering. “I’m sorry,” they said. Tom turned back to Powell. “Guilty.”

“NO!” Ginny screamed, letting out a sound for the first time, clawing at the banister with her fingernails – screamed and screamed – and was drowned out by the echoing, final thud of the judge’s hammer falling, falling.

xxx

The break was called so that the jury could gather privately and decide on his punishment. As soon as Ginny had been able to control her lungs and stop screaming, she had whirled around so fast that she knocked over a chair, and fled from the trial room.

She ran down the emergency exit stairs. She had to escape.

Run - run – run – run – run –

They could sentence him to anything now. Torture. Life sentence in Azkaban. Dementor’s Kiss.

NO...

Her heart was throbbing in her ears so loudly that she was on the verge of curling up on the concrete steps and covering her ears. She couldn’t breathe. No. This wasn’t happening.

Somehow he must have guessed that she would run this way, because he was there, halfway up the stairs, and grabbed her before she could run past him.

“No!” She twisted sideways. “Let go of me,” she sobbed, beating his chest and struggling to get away.

Tom didn’t. He held her even tighter. “I’m sorry,” he whispered in her ear.

She had been holding it in, but now tears streamed openly down her distraught face, and these fuelled her fury. With new strength, she wrenched away from him, and held herself. She couldn’t look at him. Not when she would see that face that would be torn from her forever.

“Ginevra, please say something,” Tom said after a moment, and there was a rare tone of begging in his voice.

“I hate you!” she screamed, and spun and slapped him as hard as she could around the face. She hadn’t hit him since Hallowe’en, her seventeenth birthday, a year ago, back when they still hated each other.

He didn’t do anything. He just turned his face with the strike. Accepting his fate.

“It was useless, Ginevra,” he said quietly. “They had me on camera.”

“But it wasn’t you!” she screamed at him. “They can’t send you to Azkaban, when it was supposed to be some stupid evil thing inside you they sent away! They’ve got it wrong! It’s all wrong! Go back – go back, and tell them! Tell them they’re wrong! Tom!”

Tears were everywhere. She was drowning in them.

“TELL THEM!”

“...They might not send me to Azkaban.” Tom’s voice held no hope, though. It never had.

“Tom, twenty-five are dead. Of course they’re going to send you to Azkaban,” Ginny whispered. “The only other option that’s not Azkaban is the Dementor’s freakin’ Kiss.”

“I’m sorry.”

Ginny couldn’t let loose the sobs that were mounting like a mountain inside her. The tears rolled silently down her cheeks as she stared up at him. Azkaban did terrible things to people. She wouldn’t see him for the rest of her life. And if she did, he wouldn’t be Tom. He’d be this withered, twisted thing that she’d scream to see. She couldn’t let that happen to him. She loved him.

And the other option?

He’d lose his soul.

She loved him.

“I’m going home.” It wasn’t strictly her home; it was his, but the idea was right. She was leaving. She had promised to stay here with him for the trial, and she was breaking her promise. She was leaving him alone to fend for himself halfway through, probably when he needed her the most. She swallowed. “I’ll see you when it’s over.”

Tom leaned down to kiss her, but she twisted away and walked down the stairs, away from him.

Some of the audience had also left after the first half, and stared at Ginny as she walked through the Ministry of Magic. She was the girl who’d screamed during trial. She was the girl who’d run away crying. She was the weird, emotional girl. She was the girl who was doomed never to have the ones she loved. Harry – it had lasted three weeks before he broke up with her and was then killed. Tom – it had lasted almost exactly a year. And now he was going to be ripped away from her. This was so much worse than death. Death was final. Death was The End. Whereas Tom would be somewhere, a thousand miles away, his soul rotting, either inside an Azkaban cell, or inside a Dementor’s foul little hands.

I must be cursed. No wonder no-one wants to go out with me. Anyone who I date is doomed to death or imprisonment.

This wasn't strictly true. Too many people wanted to go out with her. That was what had started this.

I hate Bernard, and I hate Scott. I'll never look at them for the rest of my life, even if the only other choice is death.

The apartment was oddly empty. It was exactly as she'd left it, but the tidy sprawl seemed depressing now. She curled up on the sofa, hugged a cushion tight to her stomach. She stared at the wall, just as he had yesterday. There was still Firewhiskey sitting on the coffee table. She drank some, but it made her want to vomit. She gulped past the feeling of sickness, and it brought tears to her eyes.

I haven't even finished my education, she thought gloomily. I just swept off to save my boyfriend halfway through my NEWT-year. No wonder I'm failing. And I failed to save Tom, too.

It was an hour before Tom arrived.

He shrugged off his coat and folded it over his left arm before dropping it on the kitchen counter. He looked straight through the apartment at Ginny – curled around a cushion, face tear-streaked, looking defeated. She stood to soundlessly greet him. Then he looked down at the floor and scratched his long nose awkwardly.

The silence was enough to chill the dead.

"They're sending me to Azkaban."

Ginny hadn't expected anything but this, but it still hurt. "How long?"

He stuck his hands in his pockets, staring down at the floor so that she couldn't see his face. He swallowed. "Thirty years."

It was like a punch in the stomach. The breath was knocked out of her. Someone in the audience had kindly told her that a life sentence was very rare, and Dementor's Kiss even rarer. She had been expecting... five, maybe ten at absolute tops... not thirty. He'd be forty-nine years old when he was released. It was so far away... she'd be close to her own time, the time-period that she born in.

The world spun, and in that instant she knew that she was going to faint. She sucked in a deep breath. She focused on getting rid of the pounding in her head. She was going to fall over. She gripped the sofa's armrest for support, concentrating on digging her nails into the fabric to hold her up. From there she stared at him, the tears still clinging to her russet eyelashes. One escaped and rolled down her nose.

Pain echoing through his eyes, Tom cleared his throat and closed his eyes. "Look, Ginevra... Ginevra... I know that this is a bad time... but it's just that I don't think I'll get another chance before I... before I go... and once I've gone, I won't come out again until I'm nearly fifty, and you'll have gone to university and fallen for the untidiest art student and forgotten all about me... and I just want to do this while I still can..."

Ginny watched him through her tear-clouded eyes. "Tom, what are you?"

"...Will you marry me?"

She stared at him. This was the last thing on her mind. Her heart would've swelled a hundred times larger at the thought of spending the rest of her life with him – images flashed through her head – a ring – a white dress – flowers, lots and lots of flowers – a house by the seaside – him - but it was punctured and she felt nothing.

"I know, the timing is stupid... but I thought that I had years and years to organise it better... I mean, I haven't even got a bloody ring... I don't even know how to kneel properly..." Tom raked his hands frantically backwards through his hair, the dark waves contrasting with his skin, paler than usual, shadows like purple bruises under his eyes; then he dropped clumsily to one knee, nearly falling over, and looked up at her. "This hardly makes it any better, I know... I just... I just love you, and only you... and if I can't have you then I don't want anyone else... and... I want to marry you..."

His dark eyes had lost all primary, secondary, and even tertiary defences. They weren't unreadable, they weren't bottomless pits. It

was just Tom, and nothing more. His strong face was alarmingly vulnerable. It wasn't really any surprise how weak he looked now – she understood that he'd just, literally, given her his heart. And she could do whatever she wanted with it.

And she chose to break it.

“No.” Another tear joined the first.

She wanted to explain – that she didn't want to be one of those women who are pathetically single but claiming to be taken while their husband is away, that she really wanted to marry him, that she loved him more than anything else on the earth, that it was just a lousy situation and it wasn't his fault – but she couldn't.

There was nothing else to say.

She left it at 'no'. And then, finally the crying came. She ran into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her so hard that the frame rattled. She left him, looking stupid on one knee, staring after her with his heart in pieces. She was the only person in the world who could break the unbreakable, and she broke him.

Ginny pressed her face against the cold door, feeling the wood soak up her tears. She slid slowly down it, curling her hands up against it, balling up into the fetus position behind it and sobbing into the door.

For the longest time, there was silence. Nothing moved. The only noise was her crying, crying, crying. Then a floorboard creaked... a door slammed. He was gone. She would probably never see him again.

She hid her face in her hands and screamed her heart out.

The noise reverberated around the apartment. Maybe some noise reached the outside world. Maybe he heard it. She hoped he did. She hoped that he knew that this was killing her, too.

The scream died in her throat. She didn't have any energy left to make noise. She couldn't even cry. She sat there, curled up behind

the bedroom door, with salt tears tracing down her line of her nose and gathering at the corner of her lip.

She could taste their bitterness.

xxx

A/N: Sorry that it's so short. It was originally even shorter, but I lengthened it a bit. If you're crying, YAY! I was. Oh, but it gets worse. :D Trust me. You don't know angst until you get 'til next chapter. And in answer to someone's question, I can't remember who said it – yes, she will be pulling a Bella. You should have guessed that! I mean, God. I'm obsessed with angst. If I can hurt someone, I will. Throw in some heartbreak here, toss someone against a wall there, put someone in a coma... the works! Well, please review! :D

Next Time:

The scream ripped Tom into several pieces. As Powell raised his voice to hold the break for the jury to decide his punishment, he heard the clatter of chairs falling over as Ginevra fled.

xxx

“Won’t someone stop this song

So I won’t sing along

Won’t someone stop this song

So I won’t sing

A lovesick melody...”

Chapter Eighteen: And This Is The Pivotal Point Of My Life

“How do you plead?”

Now, for the first time since the trial had begun, Tom turned to her. He found her immediately. He’d obviously known all along where she was. Emotions flooded him – not his face; just his eyes, trained on hers. His face was smooth, but his eyes were on the verge of breakdown. And they were whispering to her. Whispering. Whispering. “I’m sorry,” they said. Tom turned back to Powell. “Guilty.”

“NO!” Ginny screamed, letting out a sound for the first time, clawing at the banister with her fingernails – screamed and screamed – and was drowned out by the echoing, final thud of the judge’s hammer falling, falling.

xxx

The scream ripped Tom into several pieces. As Powell raised his voice to hold the break for the jury to decide his punishment, he heard the clatter of chairs falling over as Ginevra fled.

With a sideways glance at Powell, Tom decided that he was allowed to leave the courtroom for the break, and hurried through the main doors. He moved quickly down the corridor, pushing through the doors to the stairs which he guessed would lead up to the balconies above the court, and up the steps.

He was right about the stairs, as when he was halfway up them, Ginevra came sprinting down them, looking distraught. Wordlessly – there wasn’t time for that – he reached out and grabbed her, pulling her close and holding her tight, feeling total despair come over him so viciously that he nearly collapsed.

“No!” She twisted and writhed in his arms, trying to get away. “Let go of me!” She was... she was crying.

He’d never seen her cry before.

It made his eyes burn. He wanted to hurt whoever had made her cry. But harsh reality reminded him that he made her cry, and that he would only be hurting himself.

There's nothing left to hurt.

He held her tighter. "I'm sorry," he whispered, feeling the fire at the back of his eyes threaten to take over. This fire was fuelled by another fire, a fire inside him that laughed at his pain and made small, silent suggestions in his head of more death, more violence. That fire had created all of this.

So fiercely that his arms jerked in their sockets, she ripped away from him, and wrapped her arms around herself, protectively, cutting herself off from him. He knew body language. It meant 'get lost'.

Don't worry, he thought. Soon I'll be gone, and you won't have to bother with me anymore. You can go with Terby or Reeve then, as long as they make you happy.

She wouldn't look at him.

"Ginevra-" For once he was begging. He didn't care anymore. He had nothing left. His pride? His dignity? What did he reserve his dignity for, the inside of cold cell? She could take everything he had. It would barely be enough to fill her thin fingers. All that he had left was his heart, and that was crumbling, a stone wall that could only withstand so many strikes of a battering ram, of a cannon, before it was left as rubble. "-please say something..."

"I hate you!" she screamed, so loudly, so shrilly, so full of pain, that another chunk of stone wall inside his chest dropped to the ground, shattering on impact – spinning as she screamed, her hand flying out-

He knew that she was going to hit him a split-second before her hand hit his face, and he closed his eyes. He was vaguely aware of a sharp crack of the slap, but couldn't feel any pain. It twisted his face sideways, and he didn't fight against it. This was his fate. He'd best get used to it.

"It was useless, Ginevra." He opened his eyes. His words were little more than whispers. "They had me on camera."

"But it wasn't you!" she screamed, screaming, screaming. Stone fell. "They can't send you to Azkaban, when it was supposed to be some stupid evil thing inside you they sent away!" It was the first that she'd openly mentioned his demonic problem. He found that he couldn't care. "They've got it wrong! It's all wrong! Go back – go back, and tell them!"

Tears were streaming down her freckled cheeks; so many tears that the sharp, clear hazel hue of her eyes was blurred. It was a mix of green and gold that made no sense now.

"Tell them they're wrong!" Her screams were louder now, more desperate. "Tom! TELL THEM!"

He had nothing to say as he stared hopelessly at her. He swallowed. "...They might not send me to Azkaban." He didn't know why he said it. It was useless. It was like eating something, and saying, I might not digest it. It was ridiculous. He'd pretended for so many days, for her sake, that he was still hoping, still praying that everything would be okay.

Nothing had ever been okay.

"Tom," Ginevra whispered, "twenty-five are dead. Of course they're going to send you to Azkaban. The only other that's not Azkaban is the Dementor's freakin' Kiss."

He flinched at the blatant truth.

And the even more blatant truth, inside his head – that out of solitary imprisonment, and the loss of his soul, he wasn't sure which was worse.

"I'm sorry."

For a second, Ginevra didn't say anything. She stared up at him in silence, hot tears scarring her face. A frantic, devastating need to

hold her, stop her crying, never let her go, came over him. He had to wipe away her tears and tell her that everything would be okay. Okay for her, at least. "I'm going home," she said quietly.

He stared back, anguish chilling its way through his veins like ice in the artery of death in the Arctic. She had promised that she would stay with him for the trial. She had promised that she would be there for him, no matter what happened... he needed her.

He said nothing.

"I'll see you when it's over."

Tom translated that. I'll see you when you're a dead man. He swallowed, his lack of protest meaning a 'yes, okay, fine, leave me to my fate, leave me to the vultures, I'll be fine', and bent his face down to kiss her, but she disappeared.

Unable to move for several seconds, Tom listened to her footsteps behind him as she walked away. It was at least two minutes after the doors at the bottom of the stairs slammed behind her before he remembered to move – remembered to breathe –

He crumpled to the concrete steps, balling up, his hands curling into claws on the floor; groaned in pain.

He was losing her.

She promised that she'd be there for me... she promised... the time when I need her most... when I hear those words... those words, Azkaban, Dementor... when I need her... she promised...

He was losing her...

Always, Tom Riddle had been independent. Apart from food and oxygen, he didn't really need anything. He didn't need quills when he was at school, because he had a photographic memory. He didn't need teachers, because he could learn from books. And certainly, above above all, he hadn't needed anyone. He hadn't needed Mrs. Cole, hovering over him at the bleak orphanage. He hadn't needed

the other pitiful children, staring with wide eyes and asking, 'where's your daddy' while he stared back defiantly, silently, not telling, ever, that he wasn't an orphan, that he had a father... that his father had rejected him before he was even born. He hadn't needed parents.

He surprised himself by how desperate, how inconsolable, this need for Ginevra was. How the very thought of not seeing her, of not having her, made him want to be sick, made him want to curl up and die...

He was losing her...

As he lay there on the ground, he couldn't help but think silently that he'd never really had her.

xxx

About an hour later, maybe fifty minutes, maybe seventy – he had no honest idea – he found himself trudging up the cold stairs, several flights of stairs, and then stopping outside his front door. It was his house, but he felt as though he would be intruding.

Swallowing hard, Tom pushed open the door. Without looking up from his feet, he closed the door, removed his coat, folded it, and dumped it on the kitchen counter. Then he finally looked up, his eyes flying straight through the open hallway and finding Ginevra on the sofa, tear-stained. She stood up silently, waiting for him to speak.

His eyes returned to the floor. Swallowed again. Scratched his nose.

"They're sending me to Azkaban," he said quietly.

"How long?"

Buried his hands in his pockets. Stared at the floorboards. Perhaps if she couldn't see the sheer desolation on his pale, drawn face, then that desolation wouldn't exist. Swallowed a harsh gulp a third time. "Thirty years."

He heard all of the air rush out of her lungs. A reaction identical to what his had been. Looking up at her through his fringe, his head still bowed, he saw her cling to the sofa for support, her face draining of all colour. He lifted his face fully so that she could see him, and know that she was far from alone in her woe.

Blood suddenly pounded through his veins as unfamiliar spontaneity filled his head. It was so sudden that it gave him a head rush. He closed his eyes so that she couldn't see the unbearable pain they held, and words were coming out of his mouth before he could even think about what they meant.

"Look, Ginevra... Ginevra... I know that this is a bad time... but it's just that I don't think I'll get another chance before I... before I go..." The words couldn't be stopped. He hated his emotions for making him weak like this, and he didn't want to ask her, not now, not yet... but he had to. He needed to. If he didn't now, when would he? "...and once I've gone, I won't come out again until I'm nearly fifty, and you'll have gone to university and fallen for the untidiest art student and forgotten all about me... and I just want to do this while I still can..."

Breathe... breathe...

He couldn't breathe. He didn't need to breathe for this question. It was probably better that he didn't breathe, in case he began hyperventilating...

I love you.

"Tom, what are you-"

Don't speak.

I love you so much.

"...Will you marry me?"

Ginevra stared.

Realisation at what he'd just asked her powered through him, and now that he began breathing again, he was breathing much too fast, his eyes burning again. "I know, the timing is stupid... but I thought that I had years and years to organise it better..." He had envisioned in his mind something more romantic, more peaceful. Perhaps an expensive restaurant, flowers, champagne. Going down on one knee. A ring – crap. A ring. "I mean, I haven't even got a bloody ring," he muttered. "I don't even know how to kneel properly..."

Panic sweeping through him, Tom shoved a hand backwards through his hair. He knew that he was rambling to delay the answer, an answer that he wasn't going to like... if she said yes, then her life would be ruined, her life would be over, and he would have to live with that... if she said no...

He couldn't even think of the aftermath of what would happen if she said no...

Clumsily, pain shooting through his lower leg, Tom dropped onto one knee, almost toppling sideways, and looked at her, looking up at her for once, instead of down... into those beautiful, tear-blurred eyes... eyes of agony... "This hardly makes it any better, I know... I just... I just love you, and only you... and if I can't have you then I don't else... and... I want to marry you..."

This was it. This was the pivotal point of his whole life.

Every wall, every defence, everything that he'd ever built up to protect himself, those thin but strong fences around his heart, his head, his soul, seventeen years getting stronger... and with four words, they fell with an ear-splitting crash that he knew was only his imagination, but that didn't mean that his head didn't spin, didn't mean that his mouth didn't turn dry...

And he waited.

My heart is yours.

Ginevra gulped, her tears coming back again, slowly, one by one down her freckled cheeks, gasping for words, and then sobbed, "No."

He didn't move, but he didn't stop living, as he had expected. He breathed. He blinked. His heart beat. And that was what made it so much more absolutely agonising.

Unable to say anymore, she shook her head, tears flying from her eyelashes, shaking frantically, her hands trembling, and then ran. She disappeared, running into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her. The hinges shook, and he heard her sobs from the other side.

Still he did not move.

All that separated them was a few metres and a flimsy wooden door, not even locked... yet, somehow, he couldn't move that distance. He couldn't do anything. All that he could do was kneel there, staring blankly forwards, breathing slowly, heartbeat howling in his ears, totally silent, but in the most absolute, sheer, burning agony that he'd ever been in his whole life.

When she had shaken her head, tears coming loose, one of them must have landed on his face. There was no other logical reason to explain why there was a single, fat drop of salt-water crawling down his icy cheek.

He had never cried in his whole life.

Actually, he was quite glad that he couldn't move... if he had been at all in control of his muscles, he surely would have screamed.

Nothing happened. Nothing moved. Tom could hear her crying, seeming never to stop. He could hear his breathing, slow, steady, becoming rougher as slowly – so slowly – he lost control.

Breaking down, he staggered to his feet, floorboards groaning, and ran to the door. He hadn't run anywhere since he was about six. Now he sprinted, as fast as he could, feet flying, no idea where he was going, wrenching the door open and slamming it behind him.

He heard a scream echo through the apartment building.

His own raw, anguished roar echoed back.

xxx

A/N: This is the saddest chapter in the whole thing, I'm pretty sure. A few come close, but I reckon this tops them. Not sure though. Anyway, I love this chapter. Lots of angst, that's me. I'm obsessed with Shameless right now – I LOVE STEVE! Steve is amazing. He looks sort of like Tom, actually. But not that much... so yeah, please review!!

Next Time:

She was broken. Every second of every day, even when she was asleep, was spent thinking silently, I could be engaged. I could be soon to marry him.

xxx

“How am I

Supposed to be happy

When all I ever wanted,

It comes with a price.”

Chapter Nineteen: The Tallest Tower

“...Will you marry me?”

She left it at ‘no’. And then, finally the crying came. She ran into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her so hard that the frame rattled. She left him, looking stupid on one knee, staring after her with his heart shattered. She was the only person in the world who could break the unbreakable, and she broke him.

For the longest time, there was silence. Nothing moved. The only noise was her crying, crying, crying. Then a floorboard creaked... a door slammed. He was gone. She would probably never see him again. She hid her face in her hands and screamed her heart out.

xxx

She was broken.

Breakfast tasted of Azkaban. Lunch tasted of marriage. Dinner tasted of heartbreak. The tastes made her sick – physically sick. She couldn’t keep the food down. She simply didn’t go into the Great Hall anymore.

She went to bed and saw the photograph from the summer on her bedside table. A happiness that was not to last beamed back at her. She slammed the picture-frame down so that the two happy figures grinned only at the wood of the table, and nothing more. That wasn’t enough. She swept it into the drawer and locked it.

Every second of every day, even when she was asleep, was spent thinking silently, I could be engaged. I could be soon to marry him. He had said that he had been planning to ask for her hand. If none of this had happened, when would he have asked her? At Christmas, under the mistletoe? On Valentine’s Day? At Easter? Or just on an ordinary day, like any other, totally unexpected, when he dropped to one knee...

“Miss Peregrine, were you listening to a word that I just said?” asked Professor Devin crossly, folding his arms.

“No.” Ginny stared at her desk, following the pattern of the wood grains with her eyes.

“I’d like to see you after class, then,” Devin said sternly. “Pay attention, now.”

She said ‘okay’. She didn’t.

At the end of the lesson, she trailed to the front of the classroom and waited for the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher to berate her for insolence or ignorance or something stupid that was totally unimportant. He didn’t. He just asked:

“Are you alright, Miss Peregrine?”

She gave a non-committal shrug, looking down at her shoes.

“It’s just that I’ve noticed a change in your behaviour. You haven’t handed in three pieces of homework now, and the latest one that you have handed in, was, frankly, of very poor quality. You don’t pay attention in class, and I was just wondering if something was wrong,” said Professor Devin, peering at Ginny.

“No, sir.” Ginny shook her head.

“Is it...” Devin seemed to be choosing his words carefully. “Is it about Mr. Riddle?”

PAIN.

Ginny thought that she was going to pass out, or be sick, or scream, or possibly all three. She could hear her heartbeat in her ears, deafening her. There was a hole in her stomach, gaping, bleeding, it hurt-

“No, sir.”

“Because, you know, he’s just a boy,” he said kindly. “There will be many others.”

No, there won't. Because I LOVED him. Because he was the one that I wanted to MARRY. Don't try and pretend that you understand. All that you understand is what the Daily Prophet tells you, and that newspaper is a glacier – the truth is three miles underwater, and it only shows ten centimetres. Don't you dare act like you know how I feel.

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry for the standard of my work. I'll try and improve." Ginny didn't look at him. She couldn't look at anyone. If she looked at people, then they would see in her eyes that she was dying on the inside. The thought of anyone knowing how weak she really was made her blood boil.

Devin didn't look consoled. "Cheer up, Ginny," he said.

The fact that he called her Ginny didn't escape her. She just didn't care. She just said, "yes, sir," like a robot, and left the classroom.

People stared.

Ginny had thought that it was bad at the start of the year. That was just rumour-based. And now they knew the truth. A week and a half had passed since she'd left him kneeling on the floor. A week and a half since he'd been shipped off in a small boat to the prison-island. And she was broken. Not knowing why, she began to run.

She ran and ran, sprinting past crowds of people, pushing up the stairs; the corridors were thinning of people now, and she could run without her path being blocked; she was running blindly, she couldn't see, she didn't know where she was going-

And then, somehow, she found herself standing on the window-ledge in the tallest tower, staring down.

It was amazing how simple the answer was. Why hadn't she thought of it before? It was perfect. All that she had to do was take a step forwards. Then there'd be a split-second of adrenaline, rushing down... and then it'd be over. She wouldn't have to worry anymore. She just wouldn't exist anymore. Sure, he would be upset when he

finally got let out, but what did that matter? Thirty years... pah. He would've forgotten her. He would've gone insane. He couldn't possibly be any more heartbroken, anyway.

She admired how small the people below were. What a scandal it would cause – the ex-Head Boy sent to prison for murder, his girlfriend committing suicide. It would almost be funny. She almost wished that she could stay around to watch.

For the first time since he'd been imprisoned, Ginny allowed herself to think about Tom. It hurt so much that she almost started sobbing all over again, but she held the tears back. She pictured him in her head. I love you, she told him mentally, and I'm so sorry.

She took a step forwards.

"GINNY!" someone screamed behind her.

Realisation shot through her like a bullet, hitting her so hard that she fell out of the window.

What in shit's name am I DOING? Oh my GOD – I don't want to die.

She fell.

However, she hadn't even dropped from the window-ledge before the person who'd screamed grabbed her wrist and dragged her to safety.

"You idiot!" Philippa Decrow shrieked, and slapped Ginny, hard.

The sting brought the redhead back to reality. "I-" she stammered. "I don't understand."

"Just because you don't give a damn about yourself anymore," Philippa said fiercely, "doesn't mean that no-one else does!" She lifted her hand. "Am I going to have to slap you again, or are you going to agree that you'll never be sofreaking stupid after now?"

"I'm sorry," said Ginny, and she was. "I don't know. I just sort of... found myself here. And it seemed like a good idea." She breathed a

sigh of relief. "I'm so glad you caught. I changed my mind about suicide halfway through jumping."

Philippa was breathing heavily through her nose. "You're insane," she informed the redhead, "but for reason I really like you." She laughed, and Ginny surprised herself by joining in. The Ravenclaw girl reached out and hugged her tightly. "Did I hurt you? I didn't mean to slap you quite that hard. You have a big red mark on your face now."

"No, it didn't hurt. I think that it was just the shock that hurt more," Ginny joked.

A serious expression came across Philippa's pretty face, and she held Ginny at arm's length. "Honestly, though, are you okay?" she asked firmly.

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Don't tell me that you're fine. You just attempted suicide."

Ginny's shoulders slumped. She had nothing to say to this. She looked down at the ground and was ashamed to feel tears start up again. She was a crying type of person, but it seemed to be happening a lot lately.

Philippa sighed, a sad look in her light-green eyes. "You love him a lot more than you're willing to let on, don't you?"

This was the final line, and the dam in Ginny's eyes broke. Tears spilled over and she buried her head in Philippa's shoulder. "He asked me to marry him," she sobbed.

"You said no," Philippa murmured, somehow knowing everything before it happened.

"Yeah." Ginny stepped back, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. "There were just so many reasons why I couldn't..."

“I know, I know. It’s not your fault.” Philippa put a comforting arm around Ginny’s shoulder. “Come on, it’s lunch-time and you haven’t eaten anything in days.”

They headed away to eat. For the first time, Ginny was very hungry.

xxx

Alden behaved normally around her. He knew everything and saw no reason to behave any differently. Philippa, Ginny decided, was the sweetest person she knew. She could see why Alden was going out with her – no-one could reject her kindness and beauty. Grace, however, was still edgy around Ginny, and was now sticking mostly with Flora and Flora’s bimbo friends from Ravenclaw, who, according to Philippa, were all pretty evil anyway.

On Saturday, Alden, Ginny and Philippa went into London together to visit Dominic in St. Mungoes’. Grace was invited, but she apologised and said that she’d agreed to go into Hogsmeade with a Hufflepuff called Harry Aldridge.

Ginny began to doubt her and Grace’s friendship.

St. Mungoes’ was quite busy, as always. Alden’s parents were already in Dominic’s room, sitting tearfully by the twelve-year-old’s bedside.

“Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Philips,” said Ginny awkwardly.

“Mum, dad, this is Ginny and Pippa,” said Alden, smiling encouragingly at the two girls, but then casting a worried glance sideways at his unconscious sibling. “How is he?” he asked his parents.

“Hello, Pippa and Ginny. It’s very nice of you to come all of this way for Alden and Dom,” said his father.

His mother looked up at her son. “Well, sweetie, we’re about to find out how he is, aren’t we?” she said softly, her voice full of sadness.

Today was the day that the Philips family would be receiving the results of his brain- and spine-scan. Today was when they would find out whether or not he'd ever recover.

They sat quietly for over an hour, forcing small-talk, before a Healer came in to talk to them.

"Ah, you must be the Philips," he said, his voice loud and friendly. Ginny and Philippa didn't bother to correct him. "Now, we have some good news and some bad news." He sat in his special chair, swivelling to face them.

"Yes?" The nerves were audible in Mr. Philips' voice. "The good news?"

"The good news is that your son's spinal chord is totally intact. There will be no paralysis once we've Healed the bone around it," the Healer told them cheerfully.

"The bad news?" Mrs. Philips whispered fearfully. Ginny felt as though she was intruding; a glance at Philippa showed that the other girl felt the same way. They sat uncomfortably in their seats, fiddling with their hair and skirts.

"Well. Yes. The bad news is that some of the fractured shards of his skull have embedded into his brain, though not deeply. There's a little bleeding, which is probably why he hasn't woken up yet, which we can fix if we perform some serious surgery on his head. However, the state that it's left his brain in is something that we can only find out after surgery. I'm not going to dull the pain with pleasantries – I don't believe that you deserve false hope to only crush you later if things go wrong," said the Healer severely. "He could wake up, perfectly healthy; he could lose his memory; he could remain comatose... or he could die."

Tears welled up in Mrs. Philips' eyes. "My baby," she gasped, clutching her husband's wrist. "He can't-"

“We need to have your consent to operate on his skull, Mr. and Mrs. Philips’. We’ll let you know the date of his surgery and the soonest time afterwards for you to see him,” the Healer offered.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Philips in his deep baritone, standing to follow the Healer out of the cramped hospital ward.

Ginny didn’t speak. She felt as though again she was on the window-ledge of the tallest tower, staring down. She couldn’t do anything right. She didn’t dare try it again, as she realised now that it was silly, but she wished she’d jumped.

xxx

A/N: Aw. Isn’t that so annoying – when you change your mind halfway through committing suicide? –tut- Anyway. I’m so obsessed right now with the band The Maine. They ROCK! I’m lovin’ it. McDonalds’ style.

Next Time:

“What are you trying to turn into, then?” Grace asked from the next table.

Ginny was surprised, but that melted away quickly. She turned to glare at the other girl. “Oh, so are you talking to me now?” she asked coldly. “It took you long enough.”

xxx

“It’s you

And it’s true

You’re electric and I can’t get over it.”

Chapter Twenty: All Because Of You

And then, somehow, she found herself standing on the window-ledge in the tallest tower, staring down. It was amazing how simple the answer was. Why hadn't she thought of it before? It was perfect. All that she had to do was take a step forwards. Then there'd be a split-second of adrenaline, rushing down... and then it'd be over. She took a step forwards. "GINNY!" someone screamed behind her. Realisation shot through her like a bullet, hitting her so hard that she fell out of the window. However, she hadn't even dropped from the window-ledge before the person who'd screamed grabbed her wrist and dragged her to safety. "You idiot!" Philippa Decrow shrieked, and slapped Ginny, hard. "Just because you don't give a damn about yourself anymore," Philippa said fiercely, "doesn't mean that no-one else does!"

"I'm not going to dull the pain with pleasantries – I don't believe that you deserve false hope to only crush you later if things go wrong," said the Healer severely. "He could wake up, perfectly healthy; he could lose his memory; he could remain comatose... or he could die."

Ginny didn't speak. She felt as though again she was on the window-ledge of the tallest tower, staring down. She couldn't do anything right. She didn't dare try it again, as she realised now that it was silly, but she wished she'd jumped.

xxx

"Remember, focus very intently on the animal you wish to become," said Dumbledore. "It wouldn't be very good if you randomly thought of your friend, would it, because you might start turning into them."

The class laughed. Even Ginny smiled.

She remembered the last Transfiguration lesson she'd enjoyed – excluding the five or so lessons when she'd been in a state of depression – where she'd decided to find out how to turn herself into an eagle, to save Tom.

It's a bit late now.

The whole idea seemed pointless.

“What are you trying to turn into, then?” Grace asked from the next table.

Ginny was surprised, but that melted away quickly. She turned to glare at the other girl. “Oh, so are you talking to me now?” she asked coldly. “It took you long enough.”

Grace reddened slightly. There had been two weeks of silence between the two girls, where they hardly spoke, and any rare conversations that they did have were forced and embarrassed. “I’m really sorry,” she mumbled. “I was just... stunned.”

“Why? Was it the fact that someone you knew was a murderer? Or was it the idea that one of your best friends was going out with a murderer, had known all along, and hadn’t told anyone?” Ginny said, unforgiving as she Transfigured the fingernails on one hand into razor-sharp eagle-talons.

The brunette gasped. “You knew all along?”

“Oh, well, there’s another reason for you to be stunned into ignoring me for two weeks in favour of a group of the three stupidest Ravenclaws in the history of Hogwarts,” Ginny said.

“They’re not stupid,” Grace said defensively. “And I’m really sorry for ignoring you.”

“One – they are stupid. And two – ... fine, I guess I forgive you.” Ginny shrugged as though she didn’t care (she did care). She’d missed Grace a lot, no matter how good a friend Philippa was, but the fact that Grace could be so shallow as to reject her because of some new information about her boyfriend hurt a lot.

“So, I saw that you were all friendly with Philippa,” Grace said.

“Yeah, you did.” Ginny tried to grow feathers on her hand, pointing her wand at the skin and saying aloud, “Verte bestius. What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing,” Grace said, though it was obviously not ‘nothing’. “It’s just interesting how she’s totally taking my place.” It was clear what she meant. Philippa was now Ginny’s friend, and Alden’s girlfriend.

Ginny couldn’t help but feel sorry for Grace. It was quite clear that Philippa Decrow was everything that she wasn’t. Philippa was excelling in every subject. She was sensible and practical, like Alden, but she knew how to have fun. She seemed to know everything that was going on in people’s heads and how to make people feel better. She was fiercely loyal – unlike Grace, the redhead thought cruelly – and she was stunningly beautiful, with her slightly Caribbean appearance, paired with striking green eyes like glass.

“You don’t like her, do you?” Ginny asked, watching her feathers fall off and trying again.

“Well-”

“Listen, Grace,” she hissed. “I know that you feel like she’s taking over your territory or whatever, but keep your thoughts about her to yourself, okay? Alden’s pretty head-over-heels for her, and I’m not going to handle your degrading comments either, because whether you like it or not, the fact is that she was there for me when you weren’t – when I needed you – and she saved my life.”

Grace swallowed and looked at the hand-mirror that she’d collected from the front of the room so that she could see whether she was growing an anteater nose.

They didn’t speak for the rest of the lesson – but when Ginny glanced towards Grace’s mirror, in the reflection a tear glided down her slightly furry cheek.

xxx

Alden was grinning from ear to ear in the Slytherin common room.

“Oh, Merlin, what’s got you so happy?” Ginny groaned. She narrowed her eyes suspiciously at him. “You found the sugar supply again, didn’t you? Graaaace. I told you to hide it better!”

“I haven’t had any sugar,” Alden told the two girls. “Look at the notice-board!”

Glancing at each other warily for what could possibly have Alden so happy, they crossed the room to the bulletin board and scanned the notices. Slytherin-Hufflepuff match postponed... the following items are forbidden... detentions for Gawley, Black and Spencer on Thursday... happy birthday, Delilah Mascie... the Yule Ball returns... Honeydukes reopening after-

The Yule Ball. So that was it. Alden liked dancing. He liked free food. He liked Philippa Decrow. It was better than sugar, for him. The Yule Ball...

Side-by-side, Tom walked her out a few feet onto the dance-floor – enough so that they were on it, but not at the center of attention. Then they turned to each other.

A half-smile quirked the corners of Tom’s lips as he shifted his hand awkwardly into the proper position for holding hers, and then after a moment of hesitation, placed his other hand on Ginny’s hip.

A warmth rapidly spread through Ginny, only visible on her glowing cheeks, though she was certain that she was nearly on fire; a burning sensation that might have come from the feel of Tom’s hand on her waist. But it was probably just the faulty heating. She slid her spare hand around his neck, and then, avoiding his eyes, started the clumsy attempt at a slow waltz whilst not breaking all of Tom’s toes.

Taking a deep breath, she looked up into his face. Time seemed to freeze with the snow that they stood in, and in her strange dancing tranquillity, everything else was tuned out. All that existed was the poignant, smooth, tuneful ballad that rang like fairy bells; their soft, shallow breathing; that one dark wave of hair that had come separate from the rest and was curling into his eyes; the slightly dark, but

comforting smell of sandalwood and ink; the rustling of Ginny's wide merlot skirt against the snow...

PAIN.

She curled her hand around her stomach, holding it tight – there was a burning pain – a gaping hole ripped through her – she couldn't breathe - it hurt – she clenched her fingers into a tight fist and stared straight ahead, concentrating on the letter Y of the word Yule until what it meant blurred out of focus.

The pain numbed down to a throbbing ache, and breathing became easier. She looked over at Grace, who looked at her at exactly the same time. Both were thinking the same thing, with different names: I can't go. That's when I fell in love with Alden/Tom.

Just thinking the name was painful, and Ginny had to stop again to focus the hurting down into a tiny speck that she could overcome. Then she and Grace turned back to Alden, both beaming.

"The Yule Ball!" they squealed.

Alden looked very pleased with himself. "I thought that it was a big success last year, so I said to Penelope that I reckoned we should try it again," he said.

Penelope? Ginny frowned. Oh, right. Penelope Dann. Head Girl. Duh.

"Cool," said Grace, stretching it into three syllables as was common for the time-period.

"Yeah, I can't wait," said Ginny enthusiastically, while inwardly swearing that she wasn't going to set one toe in the Room of Requirements for the Ball. "I need to buy a dress, though. I was thinking that I might wear green this year."

However, Alden didn't see through both girls' facades, and happily babbled on about how he was setting up the room, and how he was going to ask Philippa to go with him, and that he was going to

enchant flowers to blossom on the floor all night, growing and dying and growing again for a sort of Winter-Spring-Winter effect.

“That’s great,” Ginny said with a smile, “but I have to go. I told Antonia that I’d help her with some Transfiguration stuff.” The lie seemed foolproof, but Grace saw straight through it.

“Have fun,” she said, also smiling. The grin on her round face was so fake that it was almost plastic. “See you later, alligator.”

Ginny slipped away through the door and walked. She had no idea where she was going, but she had to get away. She couldn’t breathe, surrounded by all that happiness. She’d lived through a War – she put on a damn good impression that she was okay, while secretly she died on the inside.

The Yule Ball. Without realising it, that was the time when she had slowly began to fall for him. She wondered when he’d fallen for her. All that she knew was that it had happened long before that Ball.

The agony was starting up again, and she couldn’t smother it. It was smothering her. Breathing became difficult. Her chest was heaving with the effort of getting air into her lungs. No oxygen was getting to her brain. Her vision was blurring. Her ribcage was constricting. Darkness was closing in...

“Ginny?” a worried male voice called. “What’s wrong?”

She stumbled, and despite the darkening world, she could vaguely see the ground rushing up to meet her. She put her hands out and felt her weight crushing onto her wrists, and weakly she tried to support herself.

“Ginny!” the voice was beside her, holding onto her. “What’s happened? Can you see me?”

Who is that...?

“It’s okay, I’m here,” the voice comforted her. “Breathe, Ginny, breathe. Just breathe.”

The voice was smooth and consoling. Her windpipe was slowly clearing, and she inhaled shakily, following the voice's instructions. The voice pulled her to her feet and held her steady.

"I've got you. Careful, now. Are you okay?"

Light rushed back into her eyes and the face in front of her became clear.

Scott Reeve.

Ginny ripped away from him, staggering backwards. It was all his fault. All his fault. All because of him.

"What's wrong?" Scott asked worriedly.

"Get away from me," she said, her voice shaking. "Get away from me!"

"Ginny-"

"GET AWAY FROM ME!" she screamed. Breathing becoming difficult – not again –

"I only wanted to help-" Scott said, bewildered.

Dry sobs were building up in her throat. A crowd was gathering, staring, pointing. Ginny drew her wand and pointed it at his face. Her grip on it was shivering, and she couldn't keep the tip still. The crowd gasped and drew back. A psycho out-of-control Ginevra Peregrine with her wand drawn was not someone you wanted to be faced with.

"I said, get the hell away from me," she whispered, trembling.

"What have I done? Ginny, I don't understand!" Scott exclaimed.

ALL YOUR FAULT. ALL BECAUSE OF YOU.

Ginny felt tears coming. She didn't mind freaking out in front of people, cursing someone in front of people, collapsing in front of people, screaming in front of people... but she would not cry. She was supposed to be stronger than that.

She whirled on her heel and ran, pushing through the wall of incredulous students that had been watching the whole affair.

Her head was pounding, her blood was racing, she couldn't breathe, she couldn't see, she grabbed at the walls for support, she was going to fall down again, she slammed through the door-

And she was here again, somehow, crazily.

The highest room of the tallest tower. She stared out of the main window. She was too far away to see the drop below it, but didn't go any closer to look, because if she took another step forwards, she would surely jump. She'd promised Philippa that she wouldn't.

This is all because of you, she screamed in her head. All because of you, Bernard, for kissing me. All because of you, Scott, for sending the memory away. All because of you, Tom, for making me fall in love with you. I HATE ALL OF YOU!

Screams rang through her head, bouncing off her skull and echoing, echoing, echoing –

She screamed. And then she crumpled to the ground to sob.

xxx

An idea crossed her head during Herbology. It was such an amazing idea that she accidentally stabbed the Venomous Tentacula with her wand, and it bit her.

Ginny yelped, and withdrew her hand. "Professor," she said loudly, "it bit me." She tugged off the ripped glove, inspected her fingers, which were already turning purple and swelling up three times the size.

“Moron,” muttered Avani, who had been forced to share a plant with Ginny for the lesson, as Alden and Grace went together, and Ramira and Claude went together, and they were the only two left who weren’t in pairs.

“Shut up,” Ginny told the other Slytherin girl, and went over to Professor Ornella to be given the antidote.

Once her hand had returned to its normal shape and size, the redhead got back to work. While she bustled around the dangerous plant, she allowed her thoughts to wander back to her incredible idea.

Why should all of the sad, single people without their loved ones have to go to the Yule Ball and watch happy couples pirouette across the floor? Why should they all have to go through such pain?

Wouldn’t it be so much better for them to have a separate Christmas dance, in secret? A dance that only the broken-hearted could attend?

Ginny thought it was a great plan. The only problems were:

A) Where the dance was going to be held, as the Great Hall and Room of Requirements were both being used

B) Getting permission.

Actually, getting permission wasn’t a problem. They simply wouldn’t be allowed to do it. And therefore Ginny was going to have to organise it by herself, alone, in secret.

For the first time, Ginny looked forwards to Christmas.

xxx

A/N: Hahah. Isn’t that so corny? They’re going to have their own ball! LOL. I’m on a new-band search, and I’m finding so much good stuff, like The Maine and Fighstar...

Next Time:

Snow crystallised the dying grass beautifully, and Ginny left crisp, neat footprints in the white, frosty carpet as she took a walk across the Hogwarts grounds with Heather Tristanebury. Ginny had told Heather about the Ball, but that her only problem was where to hold it.

xxx

“In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. Or at least, the man who says he has one eye.”

LOL. I thought that was hilarious!

Chapter Twenty-One: One Step Ahead

Why should all of the sad, single people without their loved ones have to go to the Yule Ball and watch happy couples pirouette across the floor? Why should they all have to go through such pain? Wouldn't it be so much better for them to have a separate Christmas dance, in secret? A dance that only the broken-hearted could attend?

Getting permission wasn't a problem. They simply wouldn't be allowed to do it. And therefore Ginny was going to have to organise it by herself, alone, in secret. For the first time, Ginny looked forwards to Christmas.

xxx

December the sixteenth. The holidays had begun, and it was getting closer and closer to the date of the Yule Ball. As the same as last year, it would be held on the twentieth, so that it didn't conflict with students going home to see their families for Christmas. Flora had gone home, but was returning for the Ball, and Grace was leaving the day after the Ball.

Snow crystallised the dying grass beautifully, and Ginny left crisp, neat footprints in the white, frosty carpet as she took a walk across the Hogwarts grounds with Heather Tristanebury. Ginny had told Heather about the Ball, but that her only problem was where to hold it.

"Um..." said Heather, kicking up a clump of snow. "Well, the Room of Requirements and the Great Hall are being used, right?"

"Yeah."

"So what other big spaces are there?" Heather prompted.

"The grounds?" Ginny guessed. "But that would be too dangerous, as I wouldn't be able to monitor everyone. I could use a big classroom, I guess... but then I'd need to tell one of the teachers why I was stealing their room, and then they'd disapprove and tell Dippet and blah blah blah, all these sensible reasons why it was a bad idea, and why don't you just go to the Yule Ball from everyone."

“Think slightly smaller than the grounds, and quite a lot bigger than a classroom,” Heather hinted, smiling so that her chubby face lit up. “Somewhere that you love to be.”

What? Places that I love to be...

“In bed, asleep?” Ginny tried.

“Nope. What do you like to do?”

“Er. I like to sleep. I like to eat chocolate... and eat anything, basically... and I like to have fun with my friends... and play Quidditch...” she mused. Then she gasped.

It was like that corny moment where a light-bulb appears over someone’s head and – ding! It lights up.

“The Quidditch pitch!” she exclaimed. “Ohhh, that’s such a good idea! I could use the pitch floodlights, and drape lights everywhere, and have door monitor’s to check that no-one sneaks out and gets lost in the woods somewhere... and, and, and, I could get everything out there and no-one would notice! Because they’d all be in the castle! Heather, you are wonderful.”

Heather beamed.

xxx

Ginny had to work in subtle ways about inviting people. She had to make sure that no-one else who wasn’t coming worked it out, because then the wrong people would turn up at the entrance to the Quidditch pitch in their fancy dresses and tuxedos, wanting food and drink and dancing.

Heather was the first to be invited. She didn’t really have a broken heart, but she was extremely important and she’d helped Ginny to come up with the ideas. It was easy to invite her, because all that she had to do was remember to turn up – she already knew everything.

Grace was next. Ginny simply gave the invitation to Grace. As the redhead had expected, Grace was really excited. "That's a great idea," she bubbled. "Oh, thank you, thank you, can I help set up or something?"

"Sure," Ginny had said.

"I had quite wanted to go to the Yule Ball, just to see how Alden would organise it, but I suppose there's always the Graduation Ball," Grace grinned. "But I prefer your idea. Oh, it's going to be brilliant!"

Then Antonia. This was the first difficult one – Ginny had to give her the invitation without anyone else realising. However, she was one step ahead – she saw her in a hallway, hugged her tightly, dropped the invitation into her pocket, and then, still embracing her, whispered, "Invitation to a secret party in your pocket. Don't tell anyone."

However, worries still whirled through Ginny's head about the wrong people coming to the party. Grace sorted this out by spending an entire two evenings creating an enchanted ring that served as a key, and Ginny slipped those into the invitation envelopes after handing one to Heather and Antonia.

A ring.

As she slipped it onto her ring finger, left hand, Ginny couldn't help but wish that Grace had chosen another jewellery accessory to act as a key. A tear blotted the invitation that she was writing. She crumpled it up, Banished it with a simple spell, and switched the ring to her index finger, right hand.

It had lost all sentiment.

Ginny invited Celine Xavier (because Dominic was in hospital), Ramira (because it was common knowledge that she had a thing for Jack Swithin, who was still going out with Claude), Mia Brown, who had been a Gryffindor Prefect last year, and who Ginny got along with (because she had just broken up with Luke Webber), Zacharias Odogello, a Ravenclaw (he liked Philippa), Harry Aldridge from Hufflepuff (his girlfriend from Beauxbatons had been in an accident,

according to rumour), Thomas Yates (had just come out as being gay and been rejected by most of the school due to homophobia), Melanie Isaacs (had a crush on Professor Devin, which obviously could never be returned), Jill Munroe from fifth-year, because her fourth-year sister had stolen her boyfriend, and many others.

It was only when Scott crashed into Ginny again in the hallways that she considered inviting him.

She had been on her way to the library to find Melanie Isaacs, to invite her to the Broken Hearts Soiree, as Grace had dubbed it, and was reading the invitation on the way.

Broken Hearts Soiree

For those of you who don't want to sit around at the Yule Ball watching all the other happy couples while you stand alone, wishing that life somehow had justice, you're invited to corny-named Broken Hearts Soiree.

Date: Same as the Yule Ball – 20th December, 1959

Time: Same as the Yule Ball – 21.00

Location: the Quidditch Pitch (come in through the main entrance)

Enclosed is a ring to be used as a key to get in. We don't recommend that you tell anyone, as they won't be invited unless you think that their heart is in a sad enough state to be included, in which case let us (Grace Hartwin, Ginny Peregrine, Heather Tristanebury) know.

We hope to see you there!

Ginny felt the ring through the material of the envelope, and as she folded the envelope shut again, she walked straight into someone.

"Sorry," she apologised, and looked up at Scott. "Oh. No, actually, I'm not sorry."

“Look, I only wanted to ask if you wanted to go to the Ball with me,” Scott said. He sounded so pathetically pleading that it made Ginny feel uncomfortable.

“How stupid are you?” Ginny snapped, forgetting that she was supposed to be ignoring him. “After everything that you’ve done, do you really think that I’m going to go to the Yule Ball with you?”

“I don’t understand,” Scott said heatedly. “What have I done wrong?”

“Try this on for size,” Ginny hissed vehemently. “It’s because of you that Tom Riddle is in Azkaban.”

Scott’s jaw dropped. “What? I don’t-”

“That memory you sent!” Ginny said, and was horrified to find that she was losing control again. “He saw that, and – and – it’s because of you that twenty-five innocent Muggles are dead!” She pointed her finger at him, jabbing with every word: “It – is – all – your – freakin’ – fault – that – my – life – is – ruined.”

He looked upset. “I’m so sorry, Ginny. I didn’t really think about it. I was just so jealous and angry and...” he threw his hands up. “...and... I don’t know.” He dragged a hand down his face. “I’m sorry.”

Ginny remembered his claim – that he loved her.

For the first time, she believed him.

And because she didn’t like him in return, she wondered if that qualified for a Soiree invitation.

“Scott...” she said, drawing the word out. She didn’t want to do this, but he obviously fit into the specifications. She looked down at the envelope in his hands, turned it over a couple of times, and then handed it to him. “Here.”

The Ravenclaw took the envelope warily. “What’s this?”

“It’s an invitation. I think you qualify. Don’t open it here. I’ll see you there, if you’re going. Bye.”

Saying all of this very fast, Ginny then turned on her heel and walked away from him as quickly as possible. She didn’t want him to think this was out of sympathy. She didn’t want him to think that he was forgiven, either. He certainly wasn’t. If anything, the Soiree was an excellent opportunity to murder him in the dark and hide the body.

“Hey!”

Ginny turned back to him, not really wanting to. “What?”

He’d ignored her and opened it immediately. The ring was gleaming on his finger. He held up the invitation, a bitter smile on his lips. “You’re right,” he called after her. “I do qualify.”

This hurt. She hated him, but the thought of him being as broken for her as she was for the one whose name she couldn’t even think anymore without it hurting intolerably inside... it was stupid. Stupid, and unnecessary.

She hated him for loving her.

xxx

Grace, Philippa and Ginny went into London on the seventeenth of December to buy their dresses. Grace and Ginny kept lapsing into giggles as they wandered around the streets – Philippa was chatting continuously about the Yule Ball, never knowing that neither of her companions ever planned to turn up.

“So what colours are you planning to get?” Philippa asked as they wandered into the first shop.

“Black,” said Ginny.

“White,” said Grace.

“Oh, you’re being so boring,” said Philippa. “I want to get something really colourful and bright. I want to stand out in a sea of ordinary tuxedos and gowns. I want to be...” she paused dramatically, “different.”

“Good luck with that,” Ginny teased.

They ate in a Muggle café (they’d changed some of their Galleons for pounds in Gringotts’), and then moved on from the Muggle shops to Diagon Alley.

Philippa had already bought her dress – a bright green floor-length gown that shimmered silver and white under the light, like an ever-changing sea. It brought her eyes to life and stood out starkly against her dark Caribbean skin. Ginny was glad that she wasn’t going to the Yule Ball, as she could never have made any impression of beauty against Philippa.

Grace found a plain white dress in a shop near Ollivander’s, and they had an ice-cream before continuing the search. Ginny decided, after a while, that she was going to go to Madam Malkin’s and get the perfect dress – because it would be made exactly how she wanted it.

“Hello,” Philippa and Grace said cheerfully as they came in. Ginny said nothing. She felt ashamed. What she supposed to say?

Hello, Madam Malkin! My boyfriend killed your daughter, by the way. Just thought I’d say. Can I have a dress?

She chose to remain quiet.

However, someone was already being served. It was a boy, about their age... maybe slightly younger... he turned to see who’d come in.

It was Bernard.

Ginny’s lip curled; her hands formed tight fists and she resisted the urge to hit him around the face, knock him down from the measuring stool and beat him to a pulp. I hope you can hear this, she shouted in her mind.

He smirked. Ginny took that as a yes.

“So are you lovely ladies goin’ to the Yule Ball, then?” Bernard drawled, holding his arms up so that Madam Malkin could measure him for the tuxedo jacket.

“Yup,” sang Grace, stifling laughter. She glanced across at Ginny and giggled harder.

“Does any one of you need an escort, by any chance? ‘Cause I’m free, y’know,” he continued. He looked straight at Ginny and winked, tossing his sleek brown fringe out of his eyes.

Ginny pushed all thoughts of the Soiree from her head so that she wouldn’t find out about that, and instead filled her brain with the words, How about no, jackarse?

Bernard’s eyes narrowed in the slightest of scowls.

Ginny danced with triumph, and as he stepped down from the measuring stool, she stepped up. She was higher than him now, literally and metaphorically. She grinned. She knew how to beat him. She was one step ahead.

xxx

A/N: Hm. How nice for her. I’m really bored. Seriously. I have the worst case of insomnia tonight. Where I am, it’s presently... 4:28am. I went to bed at 10. I did nothing for six hours straight, just staring into the dark, before going, screw this, I’m going on FF. If boredom could kill, I’d be long-dead. So I’m breaking the rules while my parents snooze. Haha. I had something else to say... I can’t remember it now... I sneezed on my laptop... ew...

Next Time:

At nine o’clock, Ginny stood anxiously at the main entrance of the Quidditch pitch, twisting the key-ring around and around her finger, waiting for someone to show up. She, Grace and Ramira had all

come down together, as they had got ready together, but so far no-one else had shown up. Ginny worried if anyone was going to come at all.

xxx

“Hollywood hills and suburban thrills

Hey you, who are you kidding

Don't quit 'til forty-seven

Then we'll turn it up and we'll play a little faster.”

Chapter Twenty-Two: The Broken Hearts Soiree

Scott held up the invitation, a bitter smile on his lips. “You’re right,” he called after her. “I do qualify.” This hurt. She hated him, but the thought of him being as broken for her as she was for the one whose name she couldn’t even think anymore without it hurting intolerably inside... it was stupid. Stupid, and unnecessary. She hated him for loving her.

Ginny danced with triumph, and as Bernard stepped down from the measuring stool, she stepped up. She was higher than him now, literally and metaphorically. She grinned. She knew how to beat him. She was one step ahead.

xxx

At nine o’clock, Ginny stood anxiously at the main entrance of the Quidditch pitch, twisting the key-ring around and around her finger, waiting for someone to show up. She, Grace and Ramira had all come down together, as they had got ready together, but so far no-one else had shown up. Ginny worried if anyone was going to come at all.

She glanced over at the mirrors lining the walls that had been placed so that the nervous guests could check their appearances when they came in, or whenever they wanted, instead of constantly worrying that their hair had messed up or something.

Her efforts had turned out well.

The dress she wore a black satin knee-length number. The back of the dress was fairly low-cut, the front appropriate for a teacher’s eyes. A satin belt wound tightly around her, high on her ribcage. Her shoes were flat (she wasn’t going through the pain of Flora’s high-heeled boots at Hallowe’en again) and her hair was waving down to just above her shoulders – it had grown since it had been cut two months ago. Her eyes were outlined in black... black... and a bit more black.

She was a stark contrast of black dress, scarlet hair, and pale skin.

Music blared behind her. Grace, shimmering in a simple white strapless gown, and Ramira, in glittering yellow, danced, tossing plastic spoons from the tiny buffet table at each other, spilling their Butterbeer on the snow and leaving tiny holes where the hot liquid landed and melted a hole in its iciness.

The first to turn up was Heather. She wore a grey dress that she looked pretty in, and she had even curled her hair. Just behind her was Celine Xavier, devastatingly beautiful even at eleven, who had clearly followed Heather, but wasn't friendly enough with the Hufflepuff to walk with her.

After that, people began to arrive quickly, in floods, sneaking across the grounds in their tuxedos and gowns, flashing their rings at Ginny as they came in.

Annoyingly, she had to wait at the gates for the best part of an hour, making sure that everyone who should have turned up had, and that no-one came to intrude. She occupied her time by sipping Butterbeer and dancing quietly by herself in the mirrored room.

Melanie Isaacs came in, dressed in green. She was the last person on the list to arrive. Ginny turned back to the table she had been leaning on, picked up a quill, and scratched out Isaacs from a rolled up piece of parchment.

Ginny welcomed Melanie, who she didn't even like that much, but she tried to make small-talk. The other student looked at her with disdain and sauntered away to find her friends.

Screw you, thought Ginny crossly. This is my party.

She headed towards the buffet, stuffing those olives and cheese cubes that come on toothpicks into her mouth. She began, absent-mindedly to collect toothpicks, and tried to spell her name with them... damn... why was 'G' so hard to write? It was so wiggly...

"What are you doing?" Grace asked, appearing beside her.

"What?" Ginny called back, not hearing her over the music.

Grace yelled back, just as the music stopped. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

Everyone stared at the brunette. Then the next song started up, and warily they dragged their eyes away and continued to dance, wiggling across the pitch, jiving and twisting and turning.

In response, Ginny gestured towards the 'G' out of toothpicks.

"Are you trying to write your name out of toothpicks?" Grace inquired incredulously.

"Yeah."

"I hope those are your toothpicks," Grace joked. "Otherwise that would just be totally grossville. But I also hope that those aren't yours, because then you've eaten a hell of a lot of cheese, and if you've got the burps tonight in the middle of the night, then I'm throwing you out of the dormitory."

"Thanks."

"You know I love you," Grace teased. "Come on, why aren't you dancing? This is your party!"

The redhead shrugged. She moved to the magical speakers that she'd smuggled in from a Diagon Alley nightclub that she'd found, and flicked the volume up.

And then they danced.

She tried to enjoy herself, but something was throbbing in the back of her head. It hurt. She tried to smother it, but her efforts only made it worse – louder and louder the throbbing pounded...

What do you want, she snapped at it angrily.

How dare you be having fun while-

SHUT UP. She squeezed her eyes shut.

That was the last thing that she needed.

The redhead opened her eyes and nearly staggered into the wall. The music was still going and she could hear people chatting... but she was looking at a small concrete room with no windows. It was dark, and cold, and in one corner, curled up, was a pale, dark-haired-

STOP IT!

The Quidditch Pitch faded back into focus, the inside of a prison cell disappearing back into her head.

“ARE YOU OKAY?” Grace shouted over the echoing beat of the music. “YOU LOOK KIND OF SICK.”

Ginny pretended that she hadn’t heard Grace. For once, this was easy. Determinedly, she hurried further into the thick of the dancing and tried to lose herself in the music.

Amazingly, it worked.

“...Too late, too late, doll

‘Cause I’m gone.

Whoa – oa – oa.”

Other things dulled to an ache in the background. She was surrounded by hundreds of other people, twisting and turning and spinning all at the same time. Their movements all rang out at the same time, turning the crowd into the largest, pulsing heart, beating with the rhythm of the music – a heart to make up for the broken hearts of the ones who made it.

Someone danced in front of her. In the flashing lights, she couldn’t see clearly who it was. It looked like Harry Aldridge, but she wasn’t certain. He took her hands and swirled her in a circle, spinning her

onwards towards the next partner, this great, glorious dance that everyone was dancing, breathing, living –

The one who caught her looked like Thomas Yates, but then again, she didn't really have any idea. He twirled her around him, down the length of his arm and back again, delicately dropping her back so that his hand supported her whole weight, her skirt just brushing the snow, and then back up and, and she moved on -

Her hair and her skirt was spinning out. She could feel the icy December breeze swirling against her pale, freckled skin. Her feet bounced and danced of their own accord. Lights exploded under her closed eyelids.

When Ginny opened her eyes, she was face-to-face with Scott Reeve. She didn't say anything. She dragged all of her courage into one tiny ball, and then, using that sphere of courage, pushed her face forwards and kissed him as hard as she could make herself.

If he could learn to transform out of a woman-eating asshole – if he could learn to be decent – if he could fall in love with her, the fiercest, weirdest, most anti-social girl the world had ever seen... then surely she could fall in love with him.

And forget about anyone else who held meaning to her.

Obviously, Scott seemed pleased, and tried to hold her closer, but it was too late. Already sense had kicked in.

His agonized face, ranting about insecurity and how it wasn't fair on him, and if she loved Terby then she could have him-

He dropped clumsily onto one knee. His vulnerable expression. He gave her his heart. She broke it. The only person who could, and she did –

She jerked her head back, twisting away so suddenly that she crashed into someone else. She struggled to breathe.

PAIN...

She hadn't remembered him that vividly since she'd left his apartment. Her heart was pounding wildly, blood drumming through her skull. She tried to inhale, but her ribs were crushing her lungs smaller and smaller, which wasn't helped by the gaping hole in her stomach, sucking pressure in.

Scott looked distinctly dazed. He stared down at Ginny, eyes wide.

Though she could feel him looking at her, she didn't look up yet. She attempted to get control back.

"I'm sorry," she said, finally, her voice strained, and she was. She'd given him false hope that she might like him as more than a friend, and she didn't. Reluctantly, she looked up into his face. "I'm so sorry. I just... I just needed to check."

"Check what?" he whispered, his words inaudible over the blaring music; she read his lips.

"Check that it wasn't possible for me to love you," she replied softly. "I wish I loved you. It would be so much easier... and so much less painful. I don't forgive you for what trouble you've caused for me – but I'm sorry that I don't love you, because I wish I did."

"Then that's enough for me."

Scott took her hands and danced with her, twirling her around and around. Ginny enjoyed the dance, but she couldn't bring herself to look up at him. She couldn't help it, but tears welled up in her eyes and dripped slowly down her cheeks like molten heartbreak. The very reason that this dance was being held.

He does love me. He honestly does. And I don't give a damn for him that way.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered into his shoulder, burying her cheek there, tear-spiked eyelashes fluttering against his collar, knowing that he wouldn't be able to hear.

A drop landed gently on her shoulder – but it was not one of her own tears. Ginny was torn. She didn't know what to hope for.

I wish it was rain, so that I don't have to imagine that Scott is crying for me.

I wish it was Scott, so that it won't rain on my party.

Despite herself, she held onto him tighter.

xxx

A/N: Bounce, bounce, baby bounce back to me... Love that song. Anyway. I'm so tired. Now I'm finally sleepy, having got over the insomnia. Mergh. I used my brother's bike and it got stolen and I have to clean bathrooms to get money to pay back for a new one. Ffndgfkghfa. I hate toilets. Please review!

Hey, I've got some good news and some bad news. Good news first – I've finished writing up Press Play! YAY! Bad news - ...the ending sucks. And if I don't like it, then you probably won't like it. But I can't make it any better without stretching it out like seven chapters, which would just be really boring. Gr.

Next Time:

"Anyway, that's enough of me ruining Christmas Eve for you by being all gloomsville. What about you, Ginny, what do you want?"

She chirped jokingly, "All I want is chocolate!" Yet she'd give all of the chocolate in the world for what she really wanted.

Xxx

Chapter Twenty-Three: Make A Wish

"I'm so sorry," she whispered into Scott's shoulder, burying her cheek there, tear-spiked eyelashes fluttering against his collar, knowing that he wouldn't be able to hear. "I'll do whatever it takes to help you, to fix you. I'm sorry... if we could start this whole thing all over, back to when I was going out with you, then maybe I wouldn't have got you into this... you deserve so much better."

A drop landed gently on her shoulder – but it was not one of her own tears. Ginny was torn. She didn't know what to hope for. Despite herself, she held onto him tighter.

xxx

The clock was ticking towards Christmas, slowly, painfully. It was ten-thirty in the Slytherin common room; Grace, Alden and Ginny were curled up on the sofa, drinking Butterbeers, and chatting.

"So what do you want for Christmas?" Alden asked.

"Hm..." Grace looked thoughtful. "Books!"

"You already have loads of books," said Ginny. "And all of mine. I actually want to read the ones I got for my birthday, so give them back. What about you, Alden?"

"Er. I think... I think I'd like an owl. So that I can keep in contact with my parents... about Dom," he mumbled, looking down into his Butterbeer.

Guilt fired through Ginny like a spear. She curled her arms around her friend, hugging him warmly, kidding herself that if she made him feel better about Dominic's state, then perhaps that would make up for the fact that it was all her fault. "When's the surgery scheduled for?" she asked carefully.

"January the eleventh," he replied. "Anyway, that's enough of me ruining Christmas Eve for you by being all gloomsville. What about you, Ginny, what do you want?"

She giggled. "You sound like those Father Christmas guys in shopping centres. What do you want for Christmas, little girl?" she laughed.

Alden and Grace blinked at her.

"Um. Yeah." She coughed. "Sorry. Muggle thing." She scratched awkwardly at the back of her neck. She'd always thought that she knew next to nothing about Muggles, but all of these things that Hermione or Harry had told her about or shown her kept popping up. "Well..."

What do I want for Christmas?

The answer was immediate.

I want him back.

But that hurt, and that would be even gloomier than Alden talking about his possibly-comatose little brother, so instead she chirped jokingly, "All I want is chocolate!" Yet she'd give all of the chocolate in the world for what she really wanted.

Grace and Alden laughed.

When the chuckling died down, Ginny excused herself. "I'm just going to go for a walk."

Frowning, Alden looked at his pocket-watch. "It's already past ten-thirty," he told her. "You'll get in trouble."

Ginny smirked. "I would also get in trouble for hosting my own party on the Quidditch pitch during the Yule Ball, but nothing came up... so I guess I'm good."

Alden's mouth fell open. "You what?"

Grace laughed hysterically, rolling back on her seat. "You mean that you didn't notice we were gone? Oh, thanks!"

The redhead heard Alden say warningly, “Graaaaace,” before she slipped through the common room door. She’d better make this quick – she was positive that Avani and Claude had seen her go, and they’d tell Professor Slughorn as soon as anything that she was out after curfew.

However, despite this, the pace she used when walking up the stairs to the Entrance Hall was leisurely, and she didn’t try and go any faster. She wanted to enjoy this – moving through the dungeons, alone, in the slight cold, the slight damp, to the snow outside.

The Entrance Hall wasn’t quite dark, but the majority of the lights had been put out, and she cast no shadow across the marble floor. However, the main front door was still open – the Head Boy hadn’t been yet to close and lock it, as he was with Grace, drinking Butterbeer.

Snow was falling freshly on the ground.

It was going to be a white Christmas.

Make a wish.

Ginny moved down the steps, and crouched on the bottom step. She buried her fingers in the soft, crystal snow, curling her fingers around and feeling her hand go numb as the painful cold crept in through her skin. She chose her words carefully. She only had one wish.

She picked up the snow that she was holding and brought it close to her face. She inspected the millions of flakes in her palm, and then whispered her wish. She blew on the snow, ruffling it away into the wind. She stood and watched it spiral away, the same gale spiralling her cropped hair around her face. Then she turned on her head and moved back into the castle.

xxx

“WAKE UP, WAKE UP, WAKE UP!” screeched an excited voice, bouncing on the foot of Ginny’s bed.

She sat bolt upright. "Christmas," she said breathlessly. She didn't really care for presents. She wanted to know if her wish had come true. She wanted to get to the Great Hall and read the Daily Prophet and see if, by some miracle, it said RIDDLE'S INNOCENCE PROVED – FREED FROM AZKABAN. However, obviously, that wasn't going to be possible. Grace at Christmas was the equivalent of Ginny on chocolate.

"CHRISTMAS!" Grace yelled. "YEAAHHH!" She threw a package from the bottom of Ginny's bed at her. "Open it!"

"Is this from you?" Ginny asked, peering at the wrapping for some sort of giveaway.

"I dunno." Grace shrugged. "I don't remember. Just open it."

Ginny shelled the gift out of its paper, and out fell a photo-album.

"YEAH! That is from me!" shrieked Grace. "D'you like it?"

"Oh, thanks... what's it for?"

Grace's face fell into an oh Merlin you retard expression. "It's a photo-album. Genius. It's an album... where you put photos." She scrambled across the bed to take the album from her. "See, it's a special one that magically preserves your photographs forever, so they'll never fade away."

"Thanks!"

"It's combined with Pippa's present, but – oops. I didn't say that." Grace folded her arms. "Dum dee dum."

"Well, then, pass me Pippa's," Ginny said. She was pleased that Grace and Philippa seemed to be getting on now – it was hard, having to ferry between them.

The gift from Philippa was wrapped in silver paper. It was quite heavy, when she weighed it in one hand. When unwrapped, it proved to be a magical camera – any photo taken would move.

“Oh, cool!” Ginny exclaimed. She lifted her eye to the lens. Snap. Snap. Snap. Snap. She took pictures of an insane-looking Grace... the picture buzzed out, and they giggled at the sight of how weird she looked... snap. Snap. Snap. Another insane Grace... another insane Grace... an insane Ginny... insane Ginny and Grace... the girls’ dormitory... Ramira, poking her tongue out... Claude, glaring... Avani, fluffing up her hair and pouting for the camera, even though she hated the person taking the picture... Flora, ignoring Ginny... Flora, still ignoring Ginny... and so it went on.

“Thanks,” said Grace happily, holding up a pile of Wizarding fiction books that Ginny had given her. “This’ll last me for weeks!”

“Anytime,” Ginny replied, smiling.

Scott gave her... a pearl bracelet. The same one. She’d thrown it at him at Hallowe’en, and now he was giving it back. Realisation hit her that she hadn’t given him anything, and guilt made her feel sick. Eleanor Fionn, last year’s Head Girl, sent a card with some money in it, and an update of what she was up to, enclosed with pictures of a pretty blonde grinning from inside a forensic sciences laboratory.

Forensic science? Ginny raised her eyebrows. Wow. Didn’t see that coming. Somehow, when thinking about the blonde’s future career, she never really considered the study of dead people.

Disappointment sank through her when she saw that Alden hadn’t got her anything, but she didn’t really mind. He’d probably give it to her later.

Ginny and Grace dressed, and headed up to breakfast. They brought the camera. Snap. Snap. One of Scott, grinning... one of Alden and Philippa, cuddling... one of Alden, Philippa, Grace, Ginny and Scott... one of Heather... Heather and Ginny... Scott and Ginny... Philippa and Ginny... Alden and Ginny... Alden...

The photos buzzed out one by one, looking totally ridiculous, each one of them, yet really sentimental. Ginny was slightly worried by the Scott-Ginny snap, because in it, they both looked sort of... it was hard to explain. Like two pieces of a puzzle that don't quite fit, but are trying to fit anyway.

She pushed that thought to the back of her hand, and put the camera up to take another photograph of the lovely model Alden Philips, displaying his latest pose of snuggling his girlfriend.

Alden put his free hand right across the camera lens, thus getting a snap of his palm. Philippa grinned.

"Hey!" Ginny protested. "I don't want that on my camera."

"I need to talk to you," he said, unwinding his arm from around Philippa's waist. "Come on." He took hold of her wrist.

Confused, Ginny pushed the camera and the pictures that she'd taken into the pocket of her robes and followed him a slight way away from the crowd. Her confusion mounted to alarm when he cast a Silencing Charm around the two of them.

"Sorry that I didn't get you a birthday present," he apologised, sticking his hands in his pockets, "but I think that I have something that you'll prefer to a real present anyway."

"What?" she asked, bewildered.

"But first..." he continued, "I need you to tell me absolutely everything about how Riddle was arrested. No matter who you've sworn to that you wouldn't tell."

PAIN.

The reaction was something that she was slowly getting used to, so she was able to push past the pain about having his name mentioned so flippantly.

"I don't think I can."

“Trust me,” said Alden, his face calm, but his deadly serious. “I’m willing to risk everything for this – for you – but I can’t if you don’t tell me.”

“I-”

“Unbreakable Vow?” he suggested, holding out his hand and lifting his wand.

“No!” Ginny ripped her hands well away from him, hiding them behind her back. “That could kill you!”

However, in a move so agile that Ginny realised that he would probably be a Quidditch legend just like his brother if he cared to try out, he twisted around her waist and grabbed her hand.

“No,” she cried, trying to let go, but, for once, he was stronger than her. “No, Alden, let go!” She tried to yank her hand back. “I won’t agree, I won’t say it.”

“Say it.”

She drew a rattling breath, and somehow, his eyes glowing, flashing, told her to do what she said. She again saw why he was in Slytherin. She swallowed. “Will you, Alden Philips, not speak a word of what I tell you about Tom Riddle... unless it places your life or someone else’s life in danger?”

Alden looked annoyed that she had changed the agreement, but said, “I will.”

Red light spiralled around their entwined hands, and then Ginny let go immediately. “I don’t even understand what I’m agreeing to,” she said crossly. “Why do I have to tell you?”

The male Slytherin sighed. “Ginny, I don’t want to tell you that.”

“Tell me.”

“I can’t give you any false hope, because the chance of it actually working is slim.”

“Tell me, damnit.”

Alden folded his arms. He really had grown a lot; he now looked down at her. “Because I think I know how to get him out.”

xxx

A/N: I’ve had a nice idea. At the top of every chapter, I’m going to put a paragraph or so of inspirational lyrics or a quote that goes with the chapter. That’d be nice. Argh. Stephanie Meyer stole my ideas. – glare- Not really. But it’s a weird coincidence. I already decided that Ginny was going to get a camera and a photo album for Christmas before I read New Moon. And before I even bought Twilight, I decided that Grace’s siblings were called Leah and Jacob! XD How weird does it get. Anywhooo. Please review!

Below the preview is a vote for my ending.

Next Time:

HAHA. No preview for you! I’m leaving you on a cliffhanger! BWAHAHA.

xxx

Vote:

I summarise the last half-term of Hogwarts seventh-year in one chapter, like I’ve already written out, short and sweet, highlighting the best moments, and finish on something cute.

I stretch the last half-term of Hogwarts seventh-year out into about six chapters, getting everything that happens in lots of detail... and have it really boring because there’s no fluff or angst or suspense or surprises.

Either way, it doesn't really matter, because a lot of crazy stuff happens in Fast Forward.

Please vote!

Chapter Twenty-Four: This Kind Of Hope

Red light spiralled around their entwined hands, and then Ginny let go immediately. “I don’t even understand what I’m agreeing to,” she said crossly. “Why do I have to tell you?”

Alden folded his arms. “Because I think I know how to get him out.”

xxx

You were my star

You promised me, you promised me

You’d never fade away

This kind of hope was something that Ginny couldn’t afford. Every moment was suspense, adrenaline, panic – what if it didn’t work? What if they were caught? What if she was too late? What if he hated her now? What if she had remembered him incorrectly, and the person they set free wasn’t someone she wanted?

She had to admit, Alden’s plan was brilliant.

But this was the agonising part while she waited for him to get his dad (a Ministry lawyer) an availability slot.

Then there was the part that, if anything, would be the bit to let them down. A little thing that was illegal. A little thing called bribery.

“You ready?” Alden asked, pulling his gloves on for the cold outdoors. They had a week and a half left of the Christmas holidays, and this case needed to be over by then, because the NEWTs would start and they needed to be able to focus.

“Er. Yeah.” Ginny smiled weakly. “Bye, Grace!”

Grace was staying behind to go to Hogsmeade with Philippa and a reluctant Scott, who had no idea where Ginny and Alden were going, but would clearly prefer to be with them, as though afraid that, despite

both being taken, and being best friends, they would elope together while he was in Hogsmeade.

They walked out to the edge of the Hogwarts, where the sixteen-year-old gamekeeper-in-training, Rubeus, lived. They ducked past the windows of his hut, and then they were out of the grounds.

“Well, hello,” said Ginny in mock-surprise, turning to Alden. “Fancy seeing you here.” She joked to cover her heart sweating in panic. This wasn’t going to work. And if it didn’t, then she didn’t think that she’d be able to take it.

Calm down. Breathe.

They gripped each other’s wrists.

Pop.

They Disappeared.

A few people looked slightly confused by two teenagers stumbling into the Ministry Apparating zone, but Alden and Ginny paid no attention to them and made their way towards the testing areas, trying to look as though they had every right to be there.

However, their luck ran out on the third floor corridor as they tried to take a different hallway, in hope of finding the right place.

“Hey, where are you going?” demanded a guard, stepping in front of them.

“I’m so sorry,” Alden cringed, and for one heart-stopping second, Ginny thought that he was going to own up. “Our dad works in Maintenance, but he didn’t feel well, so he’s taking a day off work. Fiona and I came to collect him, but Olivia needed the toilet, and she’s run off...” he peered down the hallway, over the guard’s shoulder.

“You say you’re related?” the guard said suspiciously, glancing between the pale, freckled skin and red hair, and the olive skin and dark curly hair.

“Well.” Ginny decided to help. “Me and Olivia are. He’s adopted. Have you seen a little redhead kid?”

“I’ll find her. How old is she?”

“Five and a half,” Ginny said, at exactly the same time as Alden said, “Six.”

They froze.

“Is she six?” Ginny gasped, turning to Alden. She grinned sheepishly at the guard. “I still go to Hogwarts – I hardly ever see her. I forget.” She pulled a sad face. “I don’t think she even remembers that I’m her sister. Maybe that’s why she ran.”

“She remembers me,” Alden said, making their conversation look like a brother-sister argument. “Maybe she just likes me better.”

“That’s not fair,” Ginny protested. “You’re not even really related to her!”

“Okay, okay,” the guard held up his hands. “I’ll call security and tell them to head down this way to look for a little girl... red hair, you say?”

“Yeah,” Ginny said. “Like me.” Then, she widened her eyes. “Olivia!” she yelled, startling both the guard and Alden into jumping back a step.

She ducked under the guard’s outspread left arm and sprinted down the hallway as fast as she could. Up some stairs, around a corner, through a door – she could hear someone after her. She had no idea whether it was Alden or the guard.

She skidded to a halt on the slippery floor-tiles and pressed herself tight against a door in the shadows.

It was Alden behind her. She reached out and dragged him next to her. Then she pushed the door open and slid through before the guard caught up.

Alden gasped with relief. "Merlin, that was close." He gave her a thumbs-up. "Nice save."

"Thanks." She leant on her knees to get her breath back. "You too. By the way, why am I Fiona?"

"I don't know." Alden straightened up. "It was the first thing that came into my head."

"Next time, you're being Fiona."

"Yeah, yeah. Where are we?"

Ginny peered around. "Hm." She recognised the concrete steps that would lead up to a courtroom balcony. "Well, that leads up to the balconies for the court... so I say we go down the stairs."

"Sounds good to me."

They moved quietly down the stairs, always glancing around for anyone to find them or report them. Despite trying to be stealthy, on the concrete their footsteps echoed like drum-beats, bouncing off the walls and into their heads.

"Through here?" Ginny suggested, gesturing towards a wooden door. Nothing informed her of what might be through it, but it was worth a try.

"Hang on." Alden frowned. "I looked at a blueprint of the Ministry a couple of nights ago... if the courtroom is up there... then the testing would need to be reasonably close. Next door, maybe..." he looked thoughtful for a few seconds, before deciding, "No, we go through the next door on the left."

Ginny lit her wand-tip for assistance as it got gloomy, but in the next hallway it was lit by fluorescent, flickering lights that hurt her eyes, so she put the wand back into her pocket.

“Hey, look!” Alden pointed. A door on the right bore a sign saying Testing. They moved through.

“Hello,” said Ginny brightly to a small, balding man studying some documents closely. “Are you the one who tests court evidence?”

“Who wants to know?” he said suspiciously.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m Fiona.” She used Alden’s invented name. Now for a surname... tricky... Her eyes flickered sideways for inspiration. “Fiona Soap.”

The man’s eyebrows rose.

“Do you have a problem with the name Soap?” Ginny asked, affronted. “My father is a highly respectable businessman.”

The man said nothing.

“Anyway, I’m from Hogwarts, and as Head Girl, I have to take notes on different careers, so that the OWL students can have a wider variety and see what sort of occupations are available for the students.”

“That depends on what kind of testing you’re after.”

“Memories.”

“Yes, I am,” he replied. “My name is Mr. Stuart, and now that you know that I’m the one you want, what are you really here for, and how the hell did you get in?”

Alden paled; Ginny didn’t so much as flinch. “We got in by pretending that we’d lost our younger sister, and then running. We found this place by luck. We need to talk to you about something very important.

Do you mind if I Silence the room?" She smirked. "So that no-one can hear your screams."

"Go ahead." Stuart folded his arms, looking bored.

Ginny knew that she was getting somewhere. The only way to impress adults was to act like one – a very sophisticated adult. She cast the spell. "I trust that you're aware of the recent Ministry case on..." she paused. Her sophistication scheme was slipping away from her with every passing second. She inhaled. "...on Mr. Tom Riddle?"

"Yes, I am."

"Good. That makes things easier." Ginny leant back on a table. Her heart was hammering from the effort of saying his name aloud, but it didn't show on her face. "He's innocent."

"Ah. I see." Stuart nodded, realising where they were going. "Let me guess – you're going to reopen the case, and you want some... help, shall we say, from me?"

"Exactly." She was pleased; so much that she was almost bouncing up and down at how well this was working.

"No."

Of course. He was too good to be true.

"I'm going to give you the full details. Our case will be that he was under the Imperius at the time. We'll collect his memory of that day and change it as we see fit. All that we need you to do is verify that it hasn't been tampered with, for the court."

"If he's innocent, why do you have to change the memory?"

"He did it, but he's innocent."

"Oh, right, yeah, I forgot how that sometimes happens," said Stuart sarcastically.

"Please," Ginny said.

"Of course – please is going to persuade me to do something illegal that could get me tossed into prison right next to your little friend," Stuart snapped.

"How about this?" Alden stepped forwards, speaking for the first time. "Please translates into a thousand Galleons and a promotion." Alden had pushed some buttons with his dad, who was very well off in the Ministry, and was certainly able to get a promotion for an evidence-tester.

"You're insane," said Stuart. "I should report you to security."

"Five thousand."

"Let me out of this stupid Silencing bubble, I have work to do."

"You wouldn't have to do it if you were promoted," Alden pointed out. "Other people would do it for you."

"Get lost. It's a privilege that I'm not getting you arrested for trying to break the law – and try to involve someone innocent."

"Five thousand Galleons... it's a lot of money..." Alden sang in his most appetising voice.

"I don't care! Get out!" Stuart yelled.

"Twenty-three thousand," Ginny interrupted suddenly.

They both stared at her.

"Ginny, we don't have that much money," Alden said quietly.

"I do," she said. Then she corrected herself. "...Me and Tom do." She took a deep breath. "Twenty-three thousand, eight hundred and twelve Galleons, fifty Sickles and a handful of Knuts. That's every

single penny that I have, plus seven and a half years of him working hard and saving up. And I'm willing to give it all to you."

Alden set a hand on Ginny's wrist. "You don't have to-"

"Yeah, I do," she said, so fiercely that he took a step backwards, letting his hand slide away from her.

She spun back to face Stuart, eyes blazing.

"Tell me how much you want and I'll give it to you. You want more money? I'll get a job. You want a wife and a family? I'll search nightclubs for your dream-girl, whatever. You want pearls?" She felt bad, but she shrugged off Scott's bracelet and thrust it at him. "Have pearls. Brass pocket-watch? Sure."

She burrowed in her pocket for it, and handed that to him as well. She stared up at him, obstinacy echoing through her face like a shout in a dark cave. She laughed, a smile forming her lips that had no humour in it.

"If you really wanted, you could even have my soul. Because if this doesn't work, then it doesn't matter anyway."

A silence resounded after that little speech.

Stuart shook his head. "Listen, girly... I'll do it. Keep your watch – keep your pearls – and keep your soul, for the sake of Merlin," he said wearily. "I'll do it. A promotion, then, and twenty-three thousand. I'll leave you with the eight hundred and twelve, or whatever it was left over."

Ginny's mouth fell open.

"Seriously?" she whispered.

"Seriously," said Stuart. "But if this gets me arrested, they'll be hell to pay from my angry wife." He smirked. "I don't need you to search nightclubs, I'm already married."

Unable to stop herself, Ginny ran forwards and threw her arms around the thin, balding man's neck. "Ohmigod, I actually love you," she gasped, clinging to him tightly. "Thank you so much."

Tears lined her eyelashes, and she let them spill down her freckled cheeks as if there was no tomorrow.

From behind her, Alden grinned. Ginny let go of Mr. Stuart and instead whirled around to kiss both of his cheeks and hug him. "You," she informed him, "are honestly the most wonderful person I've ever met. You are so amazing that words can't describe you." She laughed – actually laughed – for the first time since all of this began. "Philippa has some serious competition."

They thanked Stuart and headed back to Hogwarts. And there they lay in wait, for Mr. Philips' availability slot - for Azkaban security to send over a selected memory – for the case to be officially reopened by the Ministry –

For her life to begin again.

xxx

A/N: Isn't that nice? –squee- Yeah, I don't know if I overdid it with the whole soul thing... I probably did. Please review, I adore you guys... Oh, and, sb, in answer to your question, I don't mind answering, but you're going to laugh... I'm not even that old. Ehe. I'm your age – minus five years. –nervous laugh- Yeah, I'm a child prodigy. :D LOL.

Next Time:

Ginny laughed. "You could always pretend to be drunk again, like last year. Spill your drinks on people... find out information from the wasted enemy."

Grace nodded. "Good idea." She 'knocked back' her champagne, giggled maniacally, and staggered across to some sixth-years who all looked very pleased with themselves when a tall, attractive older girl who was out of her senses came up to them, giggling.

xxx

The results of the votes.

I summarise the last half-term of Hogwarts seventh-year in one chapter, like I've already written out, short and sweet, highlighting the best moments, and finish on something cute.

Number of: eight

I stretch the last half-term of Hogwarts seventh-year out into about six chapters, getting everything that happens in lots of detail... and have it really boring because there's no fluff or angst or suspense or surprises.

Number of votes: one (sorry, Saene :P)

Okay, sorry to those of you who wanted it long... basically, only one person XP... but I will be summarising the ending. I hope that you like it when you read it, and if you don't I can always extend it to it's full, unabridged version.

Chapter Twenty-Five: I Resolve

“I’m going to give you the full details. Our case will be that he was under the Imperius at the time. We’ll collect his memory of that day and change it as we see fit. All that we need you to do is verify that it hasn’t been tampered with, for the court.”

They thanked Stuart and headed back to Hogwarts. And there they lay in wait, for Mr. Philips’ availability slot - for Azkaban security to send over a selected memory – for the case to be officially reopened by the Ministry – for her life to begin again.

xxx

Come on, oh, my star is fading

I swerve, out of control

Music played loudly in the green-and-silver-clad common room, and it had sort of been turned into a nightclub for New Year’s Eve. Only the bravest of the younger students remained, as it was pretty intimidating.

Jack Swithin, Orion Black, Edward Fellowes and Cyngus Rosier were draped over the arm-chairs on the other side of the room, smoking their fat rich-boys’ cigars and making smouldering eye contact with girls dancing by the other wall. Among these girls was Ramira, Claude, Avani and Flora – Ginny had decided that Flora had officially gone over to Dark Side, as now she was becoming friends with those evil bimbos – resting their high-heels against the walls, shaking their hair out, swinging their hips. A lot of people were drunk.

“It’s like watching a bloody butterfly mating dance,” Grace complained, nodding towards the seventh-year boys and girls on opposite sides of the rooms. “Can they just cut short the wiggling and get it on? I’m getting bored of all the smoking and hair-shaking.”

Ginny laughed. "You could always pretend to be drunk again, like last year. Spill your drinks on people... find out information from the wasted enemy."

Grace nodded. "Good idea." She 'knocked back' her champagne, giggled maniacally, and staggered across to some sixth-years who all looked very pleased with themselves when a tall, attractive older girl who was out of her senses came up to them, giggling.

Now left alone, Ginny reached across to look at the newspaper for the hundredth time. She'd practically memorised the article that she kept reading, but she couldn't stop going over it.

CASE RE-OPENED FOR MUGGLE MASSACRE

New information from people outside of the Ministry who wish to remain anonymous claims that Tom Riddle, the man arrested for the mass slaughter of twenty-five Muggles, is innocent. Riddle has already been sent to Azkaban with a sentence of thirty year, but it has become likely that he may be released.

We asked the Ministry whether they were worried about being sued for miscarriage of justice, but they would say nothing to press. Also, what information has indicated possible innocence has not enlightened us yet, but, as the many theories have been sent in, it's a possibility that the claim is that Riddle was under the Imperius.

However, most of us hope that this isn't the case, as it would imply that, not only a killer, but also a criminal mastermind, is still at large, and – continued page two.

Ginny grinned. So far the plan had gone perfectly.

She downed the rest of her champagne and glanced across at the clock. Five minutes until New Year. 1960. A new decade.

How about that?

Grace stumbled back a moment later.

“Find out anything interesting?” Ginny asked absent-mindedly, watching the enchanted champagne flute refill.

“Er, sort of,” Grace said thoughtfully. “Rosier is gay, but he’s pretending not to be, to avoid family shame and everything. You know, he’s one those high-class purebloods. And apparently he’s got a thing for Bernard Terby...”

Ginny’s raised her eyebrows.

Good luck with that one, Rosier.

“Flora’s moved on from Gulistan – now she likes Edward Fellowes. And the instant that she stops liking good old Gulisty... he starts to like her. So there’s lots of heartbreak there. And according to those sixth-years over there,” she gave them a tipsy smile, “those really wasted ones, see – yeah, according to them, Avani got pregnant.”

Ginny’s eyebrows disappeared into her hair.

Whoa.

“But no-one knows who the father is! I mean, what, does she sleep with so many guys that she forgets who knocked her up?” Grace snorted. “That’s just what the sixth-years say, though, and Avani would probably get an abortion anyway, so it doesn’t really matter...”

“Anything else you want to shock me with?” Ginny asked.

“Hm... Reigh Dawley – that fifth-year in the corner with the wild hair – really wants to be a rockstar... but her dad goes ape whenever she mentions music or singing or whatever, and says that she’s a woman and should sit at home and cook and clean... ‘cause apparently her dad’s really sexist, and was really pissed off because her mum has a better job than him,” Grace said.

“Ouch.”

“...And Jack Swithin thinks you’re hot.”

Ginny gagged.

“Excuse me?”

“Yeah. But don’t worry, he’s not going to do anything about it. ‘Cause he’s crazy about Claude, and your personality is a bit too vicious for him,” Grace comforted her.

Ginny groaned. “Good.”

The last thing that I need is more people fancying me...

However, Grace provided the redhead with a distraction by excitedly screeching, “LOOK!” and pointing at the clock.

“Fifty-nine,” Ginny yelled. “Fifty-eight – fifty-seven-”

Slowly, the rest of the common room joined in.

“Where’s Alden?” Ginny asked. “He’s missing it!”

“Thirty-six – thirty-five – thirty-four –”

“He’s probably making sure that he gets a New Year’s Eve midnight kiss from Philippa,” Grace replied, and Ginny knew that she hadn’t imagined that tone of resentment in the brunette’s voice. “Don’t worry.”

“Twenty-five – twenty-four – twenty-three-”

“I’m here,” said an irritable voice from behind them, not sounding very impressed. “Oh, Merlin. You really haven’t noticed, have you, that for three hours, I’ve been sitting behind you?”

“Fourteen – thirteen – twelve – eleven – ten –”

Ginny and Grace yelped in alarm as Alden appeared beside them – Ginny fell backwards, off the arm-rest of her sofa, where she was sitting, and plopping backwards into the lap of a surprised-looking fourth-year, thus putting quite a large distance between her and Alden.

“Two – one – HOORAAYYYY!”

Cheers burst out, and everyone kissed the nearest member of the opposite gender for New Year’s Eve. Ginny grinned sheepishly, stretching her head up to give the random fourth-year she’d landed on a peck on the lips, before saying, “Sorry about that, dude,” and rolling off him.

She noticed Grace and Alden.

They were now exactly the same height.

Somehow – she wasn’t sure how – they were close enough to kiss, foreheads touching, but both looked like they didn’t want to be there... yet they really did.

Alden’s eyes closed... and then Grace twisted away abruptly, making her way over to Ginny. “Who cares about midnight kisses, anyway?” she scoffed. “Let’s make midnight wishes!”

She put her hands behind her head, leaning back on the sofa. “I wish that I could be really famous for a day. That’d be so cool.”

Ginny didn’t make a wish. She was secretly terrified that if she made a wish now – even a silly one – it would cancel out the wish she’d made on Christmas Eve.

“1960!” Grace yelled. “A new decade. Doesn’t look much different, does it. Hm. Disappointing.” She pouted. “New Year’s Resolutions, anyone?”

“I resolve to do really well on my NEWTs,” said Alden, approaching. He lifted his champagne flute as though to toast his resolution.

Ginny threw a pretzel at him. “You’re boring. Make a more interesting one.” She threw another pretzel, just because she could. Then she ate the rest.

“Er. I resolve... to... um...” Alden scratched his head. “This isn’t fair, Ginny – I don’t do interesting!”

“Try,” she prompted, munching away through the pretzels.

“...Um. I resolve to go to a rave with you two at some point,” Alden finally said. “How’s that?”

“Good enough,” said Grace. “That’s going to be one hell of a fun rave. My turn! I resolve to ask out Edouard Devin.”

Alden gagged. “Professor Devin’s son?”

“The very one,” she said, nodding proudly. She smirked.

“He’s twenty.”

“I’m nearly eighteen. Plus, he’s hot, so what does it matter?” Grace said, stealing some of Grace’s pretzels.

“Hey! No touchie my pretzels!” Ginny whined, slapping her friend’s hand. “My pretzie. My pretzel, I mean. No touch my pretzie?” she frowned.

“How many champagnes have you had?” asked Alden dryly.

“Er.” Ginny tried to remember. She couldn’t. “No idea.”

“Well, what’s your resolution, then?” Grace said.

“To forget how many champagnes I’ve had!” she cheered.

“You already have.”

“Then I’ve won, haven’t I?”

“It’s not a race.”

“Yes, it is. Whoever does their resolution first gets chocolate,” Ginny said firmly.

There was a pause.

“EDOUARD!” Grace yelled, running out of the room, at the same time as Alden jumped up onto a table and said, “COME ON, EVERYONE, DANCE!”

Ginny wondered where Grace had gone. Edouard Devin didn’t even live in the school. It was amusing to watch Alden dance on a table though. Grace came back a moment later, confused.

“Edouard doesn’t go to Hogwarts, does he?” she said.

“No,” said Ginny sympathetically. “I was wondering where you’d gone.”

“So was I. Aaaand oh dear God what is Alden doing?”

Ginny laughed. “He’s trying to start a rave, I think,” she giggled.

Grace fell over laughing. Alden fell off the table. And Ginny was the only one still standing. “Come on, you guys,” she said, and despite probably being the most drunk, she mothered them all and escorted them to the right places.

“I love you,” Grace muttered as she curled up in bed. “I really do.”

Ginny collapsed onto her own bed. “That’s nice,” she said. “I love you too.”

“Pineapple.”

“Excuse me?”

“Pineapple.” Grace rolled over. “Wow, I adore you.”

“Go to sleep, dude. You’re not making sense.” Ginny’s head was starting to hurt. Remembering something, she got out of bed and headed towards her trunk. She unlocked it and burrowed through the

vast mess inside it, searching for the little golden locket that for the longest time she had never been separate from.

Once the chain was curled around her fingers, she pulled it free from the chaotic trunk and opened it. The miniscule smiling faces of everyone she loved from her real era looked back at her – Arthur Weasley, Molly, Charlie, Bill, Fred, George, Percy, Ron, Harry, Hermione, Luna, Neville, Padma Patil, Colin Creevey... and, squashed in the middle, so small that she was barely visible, her at fourteen.

Something suddenly struck her.

Tom has me now. He's not going to be unhappy. He's not going to become Lord Voldemort.

The Weasleys will all survive. Hermione, Harry, everyone. They'll all live full and happy lives... except that either I won't exist, or when I'm sixteen, I'll just... disappear.

That was weird to think about. The Weasleys... minus Ginny. She wondered what would become of them. Ron and Hermione would probably get married. Harry and Luna might as well. She would have been the odd one out anyway.

She twined the necklace chain repeatedly around her wrist as a bracelet, one coil loosely circling her thumb, and then fell asleep.

xxx

A/N: Yeah, not that a great chapter. Don't worry. The next few make up for it. :D I love you all, plllleeeeeease review!

Next Time:

Time was ticking down.

They had the memory. They had the availability slot. They had the bribe. They had the trial.

Time was ticking faster than ever. In fact, it was ticking so fast that there was a bare half an hour to the trial.

Xxx

Chapter Twenty-Six: Pensieve

CASE RE-OPENED FOR MUGGLE MASSACRE

New information from people outside of the Ministry who wish to remain anonymous claims that Tom Riddle, the man arrested for the mass slaughter of twenty-five Muggles, is innocent. Riddle has already been sent to Azkaban with a sentence of thirty year, but it has become likely that he may be released.

The Weasleys... minus Ginny. That was weird to think about She wondered what would become of them. Ron and Hermione would probably get married. Harry and Luna might as well. She would have been the odd one out anyway.

xxx

They taped over your mouth

Scribbled out the truth with their lies,

Your little spies

Time was ticking down.

They had the memory. They had the availability slot. They had the bribe. They had the trial.

Time was ticking faster than ever. In fact, it was ticking so fast that there was a bare half an hour to the trial. The trial that would determine whether or not Ginny could continue to live her life.

“Come on, Ginny,” Alden’s voice called from the top of the stairs down to the girls’ dormitory. “Are you ready yet?”

“Nearly,” she responded. She was gripping the sink tightly, staring forwards into the mirror at her green face.

Oh God. I can’t do this.

She wanted to be sick, but she couldn't make herself be sick because that would just be gross, and it wouldn't happen naturally. She checked her hair one last time, even it didn't really matter.

"Ginny! We're going to be late!"

She sighed. "Coming."

Grace, Scott and Philippa were all waiting in the Entrance Hall to wish them luck.

"Oh, be careful," Philippa said, hugging Ginny tight. "The judge can twist things the wrong way. Don't worry, though. If you've got strong evidence, then there's nothing that they can do to keep him in prison. It's going to be okay, you'll see."

Ginny nodded bleakly, and then hugged Grace. "I love you, you know that," Grace told her best friend. She pretended to sniff. "Even if you don't love me back as much as you love your silly boyfriend." She grinned. "It's going to be fine."

"Thanks," said Ginny, and before she could even turn to Scott, he wrapped her arms tightly around her. He didn't say anything – of course he couldn't. This was his goodbye. Once Tom was here, there would be no chance of Scott ever having her. Ginny felt sad for him, but she too said nothing.

There was nothing to say.

It was the love of someone who knew that no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, no matter how much he changed, could only ever be second-best.

Then he stepped back. He didn't look at her. He stared at the ground as Ginny and Alden said goodbye, and then they walked away. His only chance walked away, and he didn't stop her.

Alden and Ginny went again past Rubeus' hut, stepping onto the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest before Apparating to the Ministry. When they arrived in the sleek, polished building, Ginny felt even

more sick. She didn't find a bathroom to rush into and hide. She had to face the trial.

To her fearful horror, Alden wasn't involved in the trial. He sat in the boxed balconies above her, watching. He promised that he would be there, giving her support, but this only reminded her of how she'd promised that she'd be there for Tom, and then had fled. It hurt her stomach, and she walked into the court-room without waiting for a 'good luck' or a 'goodbye'.

She stood in the designated place, under the harsh white light made to intimidate. It was doing its job; she was forgetting how to breathe and panicking.

"Silence," called Edgar Powell, Minister of Magic, the judge, authoritatively.

The room hushed, all eyes watching Ginny. Perspiration began to make itself known on the back of her neck, underneath her hair.

"We are here today to witness the trial of Ginevra Aiobheann Peregrine, with us today to re-open the murder case on Tom Marvolo Riddle, having claimed to have strong evidence of his innocence," Powell said dully. He turned to Ginny. "Do you swear to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"I do." This was a lie. She brought back all of her memories of lying in the War, and brought back the techniques that she'd mastered.

"What relation are you to Mr. Riddle?"

"I'm his girlfriend, Your Honour." This, at least, was the truth.

"Do you realise the possible bias placed upon the level of your relationship?"

"Yes, Your Honour, I do."

"Do you have any bias?"

“None, Your Honour.” She spoke with respect. Slight, subtle flattery was the key.

“The charges are as such: use of magic in front of Muggles – do you plead Mr. Riddle’s innocence or guilt?”

“Guilt.” She shifted her weight to one leg, looking casual, looking as though she was speaking the truth and was therefore not bothered in the slightest by all of this mess.

“Public murder of over twenty people, all Muggles – do you plead Mr. Riddle’s innocence or guilt?”

“Innocence,” she said calmly.

“Very well. Bring forth the questioner.”

The small dark man who stepped up was Mr. Philips. He gave no comforting smile, no familiar gesture, as that would give them away. “You say that Mr. Riddle was innocent of the Muggle massacre. Why do you say this?” he asked.

“He was under the Imperius,” Ginny said. Gasps rang out in the jury and whispers came from the journalists on the other side of the courtroom. “I know this because he allowed me to look at his memories.”

“Was there not any possibility that he had tampered with his memories before showing you?” Alden’s father asked.

“I took that precaution. Even if he is my boyfriend, I’m not going to make a fool of myself. That sort of mistake could get me killed. I have basic knowledge of memory-testing, and I tested it to ensure that it hadn’t been changed in any way,” Ginny lied coolly, despite her pounding heart and dampening palms. “It hadn’t.”

“I see. Yet, in his full trial, he claimed himself guilty and later made a confession. Why do you think that he did this, if he was innocent?”

“He hadn’t yet removed his memory for others to see. He had no evidence to prove his innocence, and resigned himself to his fate, seeing how his case was failing pathetically,” Ginny said. She hated saying this; it hurt. However, it was necessary.

“You say that Mr. Riddle was guilty of using magic in front of Muggles, though?” Mr. Philips asked.

“Yes, he was. He used magic. When the Imperius wore off, and he came back to his own mind, he found himself standing in the middle of a street full of screaming people surrounded by death. He panicked, and did whatever he could to get away. By instinct, he froze the crowd so that he couldn’t be pursued, and fled.”

“I see.” Mr. Philips waited a moment for the jury to take note of this. “You say that you have strong evidence proving that what you say is true. What is it?”

“I have Tom – I mean, Mr. Riddle’s – memory of that day in Camden, just before three o’clock, and afterwards,” Ginny said.

“Bring forth the evidence,” said Powell boredly, gesturing towards a man in the corner with a tray.

The man moved towards the judge with the tray, and set it on top of the judge’s table before moving backwards to where he had been standing previously. Atop the tray was a small glass vial, in which a swirling silver memory was easily visible.

“What does this memory show?” asked Mr. Philips.

“It shows T- Mr. Riddle walking through Camden Market, in search of a Mr. Zuker to collect his books from for Mr. Flourish,” Ginny said, confident, but not showing it. She looked as nonchalant as ever, as though she often went to court to prove people’s innocence. “Then, at approximately ten to three, he hears the word in his head “Imperio”, and the memory goes dark. Next are his instructions. Then, the next thing that he remembers is waking up surrounded by death.”

“Bring forth the Pensieve,” said Powell.

Another man from the corner wheeled forwards a magnificent Pensieve to the front of the courtroom. It was marble, and into the sides was carved MoM, presumably for Ministry of Magic.

With clear expertise at having done this many times, Powell broke the magical seal on the vial, uncorked it, tipped the memory into the Pensieve, and then put his wand-tip to his temple. Instantly, everything that Powell saw was projected onto a large, clear wall – the same wall where the Muggle television's CCTV was projected.

"Miss Peregrine, if you could step this way, please, to join me in the Pensieve," said Powell.

"Yes, Your Honour." Ginny stepped down nervously from the stand and moved towards the tall judge's table, where the Pensieve was.

Both of them simultaneously sucked in a deep breath and plunged headfirst into the memory.

She was falling... falling... falling...

With a thud that hurt a lot, she landed on her bottom on the cobbles of Camden Market. Complaining quietly, she stood up, and looked around. Powell had landed gracefully on his feet, despite his bulk.

"There he is, Your Honour," said Ginny, pointing. Her heart began to leap and act insane at the sight of a tall, dark-haired young man moving smoothly through the crowd.

Tom.

The urge to run and hug him as tightly as possible was overwhelming, but she resisted, and followed Tom, Powell at her side.

Tom was looking around, frowning. His thoughts echoed through the memory as though he was shouting them: Mr. Zuker? How the devil am I supposed to find Mr. Zuker? There's hundreds of people. What does Flourish want me to do, ask every random man, 'Excuse me, are you by some chance Mr. Zuker'?

Ginny cringed. She'd forgotten that everyone in the courtroom – including the judge – would hear his crude sarcasm.

He stopped, scanning the crowds.

Then the voice echoed around the memory, deafening, spoken softly but shouting in Tom's head:

"Imperio."

What the-

Darkness began to fade it, and the figure of Tom, still standing stock-still, began to waver...

All went black.

Ginny panicked for a second. She couldn't see. She was blinded by the impenetrable darkness all around, but she couldn't show it. She had, supposedly, seen this memory before, even though she hadn't.

Some minutes later, "finite incantatem" echoed out, and the darkness began to fade away.

She saw blood – running Muggles – limp, stained figures – children screaming – bewilderment, followed by terror, flashing onto Tom's strong face-

As her heart began to race, Ginny was dragged by the judge back into the courtroom. Horrified jurors and the members of the audience were staring at where the memory had been projected onto the wall – journalists were practically drooling at the idea of a hot new story.

Powell sat back in his seat, smoothing the front of his jacket. "Miss Peregrine, please return to the stand."

Reluctantly, Ginny stepped back into the harsh, blaring light.

“Mr. Stuart, please could you come forwards? I’ll need to verify that this memory has not been tampered with,” said Powell boredly, holding out what was left of the memory in the vial.

“Yes, Your Honour,” said Stuart. His eyes didn’t flick in familiarisation towards the redhead on the stand. He moved easily towards the judge, took the vial, and disappeared through the doors at the back of the courtroom.

A moment passed...

Would he stay true to his word? Would it work?

Would it all be for nothing?

Stuart came back in. He walked swiftly to Powell before holding aloft the memory, now coloured green. “It’s pure.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stuart,” said Powell.

As the tester returned to where he had been standing, his eyes flickered over everyone around him – lingering an eighth of a second longer on Ginny than anyone else.

“So, Miss Peregrine,” said Mr. Philips, drawing attention back to him. “Your case has been clarified – Tom Riddle was indeed under the Imperius Curse for the Muggle slaughter. Do you have anything else to add?”

“No.” Ginny tried not to let her grin burst out. Not here, not now.

“Your Honour, my point has been made,” said Mr. Philips, turning to Powell. “You may continue as you see fit.” With a respectful nod, he walked away from the questioning step.

“Thank you.” Powell didn’t sound remotely grateful. “We have found Mr. Riddle innocent of murder. The case is now the jury’s – I call a momentary break for the jury to configure, discuss, and decide on what will happen now to the wrongly accused.”

“Not necessary, Your Honour,” called one of them; an average-looking blonde man with glasses. “The decision has been made.”

“Very well.”

The man climbed out of his box and progressed towards the judge, holding a sheet of parchment, which he put on the table. He murmured something, before nodding, and saying, “Of course, Your Honour”, and heading back towards the rest of the juror.

Powell glanced across the parchment in front of him.

He picked up his little wooden hammer.

Ginny’s heart hammered faster, faster, faster-

“The decision of the jury has been confirmed-”

-like a steam-train gathering speed inside her chest, faster, faster-

“-that Mr. Riddle is now declared innocent-”

Oh GOD-

“-and therefore-”

He lifted his hammer higher, just about to bring it down. The final decision. The end. Or maybe just the beginning.

“-Mr. Tom Marvolo Riddle is due to-”

Ginny’s head swam. She felt her knees giving out. She was going to collapse in front of the whole court, she just knew it.

Her heart stopped.

The hammer went higher.

The hammer went down.

“-be enlisted for release from Azkaban Prison.”

Bang.

xxx

A/N: Hm. I know that a lot of people were like, ‘urrrh I don’t think it’s going to work’ and yeah, in reality, I don’t think it would have worked, but still. :D I need to work, otherwise the plot just kind of dies. Please review!

I HAD AN AMAZING PLOT-BUNNY FOR FAST-FORWARD! That fic is going to be great.

Next Time:

“What’s wrong with her?” Scott demanded, panic and worry flashing like fire in his warm brown eyes.

“Don’t worry, she’s fine,” Alden told them. He saw their incredulous faces, and looked down at her. She hadn’t blinked or moved since the end of the trial. “Well.” He twisted his mouth sideways thoughtfully. “I’m not really sure, but I think she’s gone into shock.”

Xxx

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Your Lifeline

“The decision of the jury has been confirmed-” –her heart was like a steam-train gathering speed inside her chest, faster, faster- “-that Mr. Riddle is now declared innocent-” Oh GOD- “-and therefore-” He lifted his hammer higher, just about to bring it down. The final decision. The end. Or maybe just the beginning. “-Mr. Tom Marvolo Riddle is due to-” Ginny’s head swam. She felt her knees giving out. She was going to collapse in front of the whole court, she just knew it. Her heart stopped. The hammer went higher. The hammer went down. “-be enlisted for release from Azkaban Prison.” Bang.

Xxx

Hold on

When you feel like letting go

Hold on

It gets better than you know

Hold on

Ginny managed it into the Entrance Hall before she started crying.

Scott, Philippa, and Grace were all there, looking as though they hadn’t left since that morning, when they’d wished her good luck. They looked up in alarm and anticipation when they came in.

“Ohmigod, what happened?” Grace clucked, sweeping in immediately. “...oh God. Oh Merlin, he’s staying in prison, isn’t he? Ginny? Oh, Ginny, are you okay?”

She didn’t move. She stared blankly ahead.

“Ginny?” Philippa asked nervously, peering at her.

“What’s wrong with her?” Scott demanded, panic and worry flashing like fire in his warm brown eyes.

“Don’t worry, she’s fine,” Alden told them. He saw their incredulous faces, and looked down at her. She hadn’t blinked or moved since the end of the trial, when she had stammered thank you and stumbled out of the courtroom. “Well.” He twisted his mouth sideways thoughtfully. “I’m not really sure, but I think she’s gone into shock.”

Grace and Philippa started to laugh weakly, while Scott remained fiercely protective. “It’s okay, Ginny,” he said softly. “It was unlikely that he’d be released anyway, you always knew that. And you still have us-”

“No,” she said suddenly, startling everyone. Still looking blank, she moved her vacant stare to Scott’s face.

“No?” Scott echoed.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then, so quickly that it was ridiculous, she threw her arms around Scott tightly and burst into tears. “He’s coming back,” she sobbed. “Oh my God, he’s actually coming back!”

“Seriously?” Grace gasped. “Merlin, Ginny – oh Merlin – this is wonderful!”

Everyone was crowding around her and giving her hugs, babbling happily and squeezing her tightly while she cried like a baby, laughing through her tears about how stupid she was being.

“You’re not being stupid,” Alden told her, grinning. “You’re happy.”

“I am, I am,” she howled, tears streaming down her freckled face. “God, I’m so happy!”

“I can tell,” Philippa said teasingly, holding out a handkerchief.

She didn’t realise until much later that there were only three people in the group congratulating her. Someone was missing. Ginny looked around in alarm, counting heads. “Where’s...”

Philippa and Grace exchanged a quick, silent glance.

Scott was gone.

xxx

Since Tom was in Azkaban and therefore unable to send or receive letters, Ginny didn't expect post anymore. It was because of this that when a large, snooty-looking owl dropped a letter on her plate the next morning at breakfast, she assumed it was for Grace.

"Grace," she said, holding out the envelope and continuing to munch her way through her baked beans, though much of it was on the envelope that she handed over to her friend.

The brunette took it. "Scourgify." The baked beans fell off, and the letter was left clean. Grace scrutinised the words on the front. "No, Ginny, it's for you!" she exclaimed.

Ginny frowned. "Who-?"

Before she could take it back, Grace flipped over her letter. Her blue eyes widened to the size of golf-balls. "OHMIGOD IT'S FROM THE MINISTER OF MAGIC!" she yelped, therefore drawing the amazed attention of everyone in the Great Hall, including teachers.

Dubious, Ginny took the envelope and read the neat handwriting on the back.

Mr. Edgar Powell

Minister of Magic

She didn't bother to read the address. She gaped. "Whoa," she said. "Wonder what he wants." She grinned. "Maybe he's inviting me around for dinner."

Two first-years opposite her let their mouths fall open in astonishment.

Ginny winked at them. "Close friend of mine, dear Edgar," she said.

"Well, read it!" Philippa exclaimed excitedly, who was sitting at the Slytherin table today.

Hands trembling slightly, she opened the letter.

Dear Miss Peregrine,

I send you this letter with the sincerest apologies for the miscarriage of justice carried upon your beau. We hope that you can accept ten thousand Galleons of compensation. The date of release has been confirmed for the eleventh of January, and if you would like to be there, please R.S.V.P immediately to this address and meeting place will be designated for you.

Thank you for your time, and I apologise again for the inconveniences.

Edgar Powell, Minster for Magic

Ginny couldn't help herself. She shrieked loudly and threw her arms around Grace, Philippa, and stretched awkwardly across the table to hug Alden as well, though it was difficult. Flora, sitting nearby, sniffed with disdain and looked away.

"The eleventh of January," she squealed. "He's coming out on the eleventh of January, and they're asking me if I want to be there! And I'm getting ten thousand Galleons of compensation!"

"WHOA!" Grace yelled, drawing even more attention to them. Philippa laughed. "That is a hell of a lot of cash!"

"Hey, that almost pays back..." Alden coughed meaningfully, raising an eyebrow.

He was right. That a bit less than half of the money paid back that Ginny had 'borrowed' from Tom to bribe the memory-tester. However, Ginny thought, if I added that to the eight-hundred-and-twelve that she had personally, which Stuart had let her keep... That was nearly eleven thousand.

“Not completely,” Ginny corrected, “but it’s a start.”

“What’s a start?” Grace asked.

“Nothing,” the redhead and the Head Boy replied simultaneously.

Then Alden frowned. “The eleventh of January?” he repeated, peering across the table to look at Powell’s letter. “That’s the day of...” he trailed off before muttering, “Dom’s surgery.”

“Oh,” Ginny whispered. “Oh, I’m so sorry! I said that I was going to be there, didn’t I?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Alden said, shaking his head. “Go and get Riddle. I’m not stupid, you know. I know what runs priority.”

Ginny’s face screwed up. “Please shout at me,” she pleaded. “Please, otherwise I’m going to feel really guilty for the rest of my life! Don’t be nice to me about it.”

“Look, it’s fine,” Alden assured her.

“Aaaaldeeen, you’re making me feel horrible – I’m going to start crying again, and that’s going to be really embarrassing!” Ginny protested.

Alden didn’t look impressed. “Fine,” he said calmly. “Peregrine, you’re a bitch and I hate you.” He took a laid-back sip from his pumpkin juice.

“Thank you,” said Ginny, hugging him. “I love you, you know I do. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine,” said Alden, and for ten minutes, everything was fine. And then the real worries began to build up again.

How long did it take for a soul to decay?

xxx

On the eleventh of January, Grace, Ginny, Alden and Philippa met in the Great Hall again. The last day of the Christmas holidays had been yesterday, and now there was just this one weekend before they had to get serious and concentrate – something that Ginny needed to do more than anyone else, as she'd been absent for many lessons, swanning off to help Tom.

“Good luck,” they all wished each other.

Philippa and Alden were going to watch over Dom's surgery; Grace was taking Ginny to the meeting point where she would go with the Ministry to Azkaban.

Scott was still missing.

“Give your dad my thanks, times a million,” Ginny said to Alden, “and tell Dom I love him, even if he can't hear you.”

“Will do.” Alden smiled. “Say hi to Riddle for me.”

They hugged tightly, and then went their separate ways.

As Ginny and Grace walked down to the edge of the Hogwarts grounds – for Grace, the first time, for Ginny, a familiar route – the brunette said, “You really love him, don't you?”

Ginny gave a start. “Who, Alden?”

Grace rolled her eyes. “Yes,” she said sarcastically. “Alden. No, stupid. Riddle.”

Ginny didn't answer this question. She stared determinedly ahead, and said instead, “Here we are. Take my hand.”

Gripping each other's wrists, they took a deep breath and Disapparated. This was it.

The port was as far as Grace was allowed to go. They said goodbye surrounded by smoke and boats, with Ministry officials waiting a few

metres away. Ginny cast a fearful glance out at the seemingly endless dark sea. "Don't leave me here alone," she whispered.

"It's okay," said Grace, tapping the end of Ginny's nose. "Trust me. In less than two hours, you'll have your beloved back, and then everything will be much better, right?"

"Right," Ginny repeated firmly. She didn't say goodbye or thank you – she needed to keep that message in her mind, as opposed to a simple farewell.

In less than two hours, I'll have Tom back, and everything will be much better. Remember that. Remember. Breathe. Now walk.

Ginny moved across to the Ministry officials, trying to look calm. They verified that she was who they were supposed to be meeting, and then took her onto the tiny boat prepared for them.

Is this supposed to be able to handle the ocean?

She was terrified, she would admit it. The Dementors would show her the worst memories that she had, and she had a lot of bad memories. They would be a fight for the worst. It was a competition that she wasn't sure she had the stomach to watch.

Twenty minutes of icy ocean winds sweeping straight through her later, the tall granite structure rose on the horizon. Even from several miles away, the sight of Azkaban Prison sent a chill through Ginny's spine. She could identify the black shadows swirling around it, and already their supernatural gloom was creeping through her blood.

They pulled into the dock five minutes later, and Ginny already felt as though she wanted to die.

Tom spent the best part of a month here.

As soon as they walked through the massive doors, it hit her.

Blood, pooling around her feet. Ron's screams echoed and echoed, of absolute agony, his face draining of all colour as his body rapidly emptied of blood onto the floor around her...

The green light flashed brighter than anything, and a single tortured scream rose up from everyone present as their only saviour fell. Ginny was screaming louder than anyone. The green eyes of her first love widened, bulged, and then his glasses fell. And Harry tumbled forwards lifeless...

Voldemort wasn't done yet. "Look at you! Look at you, standing there, like nothing's changed! For you, nothing has changed, has it? How long has it been for you? A day, two? A week? A month, at most? It has been FORTY-EIGHT bloody years!" he shouted. "Forty-eight years that I've been counting the days, saying to myself, she'll be back tomorrow. Forty-eight years I've been tearing myself apart into Horcruxes so that I could rule the world! Because if I ruled the world, then everyone would obey me! And I could find you! Search the globe if I had to! And then... and then he took over, and it wasn't about you anymore, it was about the power and his greed for everything. I changed my name – Lord Voldemort. It made me sound better, more important. It meant that I never had to hear people whine Tom again. Not after I'd had that name called to me by the sweetest voice I'd ever hear."

Tom raked his hands frantically backwards through his hair, the dark waves contrasting with his skin, paler than usual, shadows like purple bruises under his eyes; then he dropped clumsily to one knee, nearly falling over, and looked up at her. "This hardly makes it any better, I know... I just... I just love you, and only you... and if I can't have you then I don't want anyone else... and... I want to marry you..." His strong face was alarmingly vulnerable. It wasn't really any surprise how weak he looked now – she understood that he'd just, literally, given her his heart. And she could do whatever she wanted with it. And she chose to break it. "No."

She squeezed her eyes shut, took a deep breath and tried to calm herself down. She pictured happy things, good things. It wasn't working.

“You alright?” asked one of the guards.

She nodded, not able to speak, and followed them further.

It was a labyrinth. She wondered in awe how the guards managed to find their way around. Left, right, up the stairs, through a corridor, left again... it was dark, and cold, and it made Ginny’s heart slow right down, though the pressure inside it made it feel as if it was a runaway train.

His strong face was alarmingly vulnerable. It wasn’t really any surprise how weak he looked now – she understood that he’d just, literally, given her his heart. And she could do whatever she wanted with it. And she chose to break it. “No.”

She could hear screaming, groaning, crying, shouting, insane muttering...

“Just a little further, don’t worry,” the guard comforted her gruffly. She was grateful for him being there, as the other two guards were ignoring her.

The pressure inside her was steadily climbing.

And then the guards finally stopped in front of blank door that gave no indication as to how they knew that it was the right one.

“Here we are,” the kind guard sang cheerfully, whistling as he unlocked the door.

He’d just, literally, given her his heart. And she could do whatever she wanted with it. And she chose to break it. “No.”

Heart stopping entirely, Ginny turned her head away from the doorway as the door swung upon. She couldn’t. She couldn’t.

She had to.

She could feel the pressure crushing the air from her lungs.

Slowly, she lifted her face and looked into the cell.

He was curled up in the corner, on the floor, his back pressed against one wall, his shoulder pressed against another. He was thinner than he'd ever been, and so pale that his skin was almost see-through, a frightening contrast against the ragged dark shadow on his jaw. The shadows under his eyes looked as though he'd been in a nasty fight, and outnumbered. His hair was too long, too untidy.

She barely recognised him.

Then he turned to look at her.

Her afraid hazel eyes collided with his agonised dark ones, and knew instantly that he was who she thought he was, he was the same, he hadn't changed, he was Tom, he was hers.

"Hello, Mr. Riddle," called the guard cheerfully; Tom flinched at the loud noise, pressing his head against the wall. "Today's your lucky day! You're going home. Come on, now."

Ginny took a wary step towards him to help him up, but he stood by himself. He had looked so fragile on the floor that it was a surprise that when he stood up, he was still a foot taller than her.

She didn't dare to speak. Memories were rushing through her head – or, more accurately, one memory.

His strong face was alarmingly vulnerable. It wasn't really any surprise how weak he looked now – she understood that he'd just, literally, given her his heart. And she could do whatever she wanted with it. And she chose to break it. "No."

For the longest time, there was silence. Nothing moved. The only noise was her crying, crying, crying. Then a floorboard creaked... a door slammed. He was gone. She would probably never see him again. She hid her face in her hands and screamed her heart out.

It was only when they got back into the little boat after signing out and pushed away from the port that Ginny dared to move. She took his

hand, curling her fingers through his cold ones, tucking her thumb up against his icy palm. He didn't even seem to register that she'd done anything. His hand was limp, dead.

It frightened her.

Grace hadn't waited in the port, and Ginny didn't really blame her. Ginny wouldn't have wanted to see her anyway, and Tom certainly wouldn't have wanted an audience.

"I'm so sorry for the inconvenience this has caused you," the nice guard said. "As I'm sure Miss Peregrine will tell you, you have a good lot of compensation for this." He smiled. "Have a nice life, you two, and I hope that we never meet again."

"Thank you," said Ginny, smiling back at him. Wordlessly, she glanced at Tom, who staring straight ahead as though he wasn't at all bothered by all of this, and then Apparated them back to his apartment.

She let go of his hand when they were back, and he didn't do anything. He still stared blankly in front of him, looking thoroughly uninterested. However, she could hear his breath getting rougher and rougher.

"Um." Ginny bit her lip. "Are you okay?"

It was as though those words had triggered some sort of alarm, some sort of instinctive reaction, because without warning, he collapsed.

"Tom!" she cried, ducking down beside him. She didn't know what to say to him to comfort him, or to wake him up. She imagined various conversations.

Her: What's wrong?

Him: Everything.

Her: Are you okay?

Him: Of course not.

Her: Do you still love me?

Him: (silent)

Panic was coursing through like lightning, like electricity. "It's alright," she said, trying to get him upright so that she could perhaps dump him on the sofa, where it would probably be more comfortable than sprawled out on the floorboards.

But then again, he'd had nothing but stone floor for a month. Perhaps the floorboards were comfortable to him.

Either way, he was surprisingly heavy for how thin he was, and she had slight difficulty pushing him onto the beige sofa.

"I'll get you something to drink, or eat, or whatever," she said, and hurried away into the kitchen. She was frantically scrubbing a layer of dust from a glass so that she could pour him a glass of water when she heard him say something quietly.

Huh?

She turned around. "What?"

He was standing now, as though he hadn't just crumpled to the ground a second ago like a house of cards. Staring at her, with unreadable eyes. He repeated himself, his voice muted and strangled. "Why did you bother?"

Ginny's mouth fell slightly open. "I-" she blinked, not understanding. Then, whispered, "What?"

For a moment, he looked at her in silence, and those eyes were unreadable because of the sheer depth of raw emotion swirling through at a hundred miles an hour. There were thousands, but she could only distinguish one... agony.

Then, as if he couldn't stand to look at her anymore, Tom ripped his eyes away and walked out of the apartment.

Ginny stared after him, eyes blurring with tears, still clutching a dirty glass and a sponge as though they were her life-line. They weren't. He was her life-line. And what did you do when your life-line snapped?

xxx

A/N: Dun dunn DUNNNN. Hooooowdy. I'm feeling a bit random today. I tip mah hat to y'all. I used to live in Texas. I had the most amazing American drawl, and I was only six. Yeahhhh, that's the way we roll. Reviewwww.

In response to VampiricEmbrace, yes, it is so Tom-ish for him to be a jerk. And he's going to be a jerk. Isn't that just lovely for our angst-factors? And to GoldenTresses, Alden is actually based on my friend Asher, who is exactly like him, except with a bit of a different personality. And Asher never got any taller. And I made GracexAlden because I thought it would be funny – Grace is based on me, and I used to have a thing for Asher. LOL.

Next Time:

Ginny sat on the sofa, clutching a glass of orange juice, waiting for him to come back.

He didn't.

xxx

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Try This On For Size

He was standing now, as though he hadn't just crumpled to the ground a second ago like a house of cards. Staring at her, with unreadable eyes. He repeated himself, his voice muted and strangled. "Why did you bother?"

For a moment, he looked at her in silence, and those eyes were unreadable because of the sheer depth of raw emotion swirling through at a hundred miles an hour. There were thousands, but she could only distinguish one... agony. Then, as if he couldn't stand to look at her anymore, Tom ripped his eyes away and walked out of the apartment.

Xxx

The day, that you, slipped away

Was the day, that I knew, it would never be the same

Ginny sat on the sofa, clutching a glass of orange juice, waiting for him to come back.

He didn't.

The clock on the wall was a speaking reminder – tick tock, tick tock – that he'd been gone three hours without explaining where he was going or why. She tried not to worry, but worried anyway.

Why did I bother, she echoed his words. Why did I bother – because I love him, and I need him... and I thought that he needed me too.

She let another half-hour escape her before setting down her orange juice (she hadn't drunk any. She felt sick), grabbing her wand and a Muggle torch, and heading out of the apartment after him.

As soon as she was sure that no Muggles could see her, she pulled out her wand, put it flat on her palm, and whispered, "Point me." The wand spun on her hand to point North. "No, stupid," she argued. "To Tom, to Tom!" It didn't move. "Point me... to Tom," she tried again.

This time, it spun again, and pointed in a totally different direction.

She tucked her wand into the waistband of her skirt, pulled out of the torch, and flicked it on, walking in the direction that her wand had pointed to.

The soft yellow light didn't illuminate the streets as well as she'd have liked it to, but it lit up hiding cats and garden gnomes so that she didn't fall over them, which was good enough for her.

A half-moon shone faintly from behind the clouds, dappling silver across her skin.

She checked her wand repeatedly as she wandered blindly through the streets of London, armed (to a Muggle's eyes, at least) with only a fading torch and fear pumping adrenaline through her.

At least, the tip of her wand lit up, showing her that she was nearby. And it pointed... straight to the entrance of a small Muggle pub called The Rusty Spoon. It was an unoriginal name, Ginny couldn't help but think as she went through the heavy wooden doors.

It was easy to find Tom. He was the one slumped over the counter, staring darkly at a beer in front of him. Or, more accurately, one full beer... and about seven other empty ones.

One of the drunks – several, in fact – leered at her and shouted crude chat-up lines from across the pool-table, waving and laughing loudly. She ignored them, and crossed to the bar.

"Hi," she said to Tom, and took the full beer from him. Heart thudding at the dangerous things that could happen if he was drunk, she downed some, and smiled at him, as though she didn't know him or anything about him. "Cheers."

"Geddllost," he muttered, glaring at the counter in from of him.

"Another beer, mate?" asked the bartender sympathetically, and, without waiting for a response, dragged some of the golden liquid

from the tap and pushed the glass towards him. "Be nice, this one's pretty," he whispered conspiratorially to Tom.

This one? Ginny scowled. "I can hear you," she told the bartender crossly, "and I can understand. I'm not drunk."

He winked. "I can fix that."

"No thanks." She turned her back on him and dropped herself into the stool next to Tom. "You're being stupid," she told him.

"I said, geddllost!" Tom slurred at her angrily.

"You hate alcohol," Ginny reminded him. "This is pointless, and is only going to make you feel worse in the morning."

"Didn't stop you, diddit?" Tom suddenly snapped. "All those times when you thought I couldn't see you. The Hall'we'en Ball – I saw you getting smashed, drink by drink, when Reeve said some'in' to you while you were dancing wivim. Did Hartwin ever tell you that I was the one who dragged your carcass to safety from the bottom of the dungeon steps after you fell ten metres and hit your head?"

Ginny blinked. She didn't remember.

"Didn' think so," Tom muttered. "An' if you dun remember that happenin', then I rest my case."

"That's beside the point," Ginny tried to say. "This is going to-"

"You," he suddenly snarled, pointing a swaying finger at her, "shuddup. Don' you dare tell me that thissis beside 'e point. What was your probl'm wiv Reeve then? Lemme guess, he insult'd your fam'ly or some'in' else crap. Try this on f'r size, why dun you? Your girlfr'nd goes pissin' around wiv other people... you try 'n sortit out, 'n she has a go at you. You get angry, you nearly kill 'er. You get even angr'r, wiv your-freakin'-self, go out, kill lots 'n lots of freakin' people. So you get tossed into the latest waste bucket while your girlfr'nd dun even give a flyin' shyte anymore. Try that on, yeah? Then come back and freakin' tell me that it's beside 'e point."

A lot of people were staring at them now, including the bartender. Staring at this bedraggled, wasted man muttering furiously about killing people.

“Don’t worry,” Ginny told them. “Doesn’t understand a word he’s saying.” They didn’t look consoled, but they turned away.

“Yezzi do,” Tom complained darkly.

“Listen to me,” Ginny hissed, bending her face close to where his face was, slumped forwards. “Okay, so maybe I’m being a hypocrite, and maybe I’ve had my fair share of getting wasted to the point of passing out. However, I think you’ll find that I do, in fact, give a ‘flying shyte’ about you, so to speak. If I didn’t care about you – a lot – then do you think that I would have gone to all that trouble to get you out of Azkaban? Do you think that I would have spent every Knut of every Galleon that I have bribing this person and persuading that person to let you live your life again? It wasn’t just your life, you know. It’s my life, too, and I’m totally caught up in this. But this is ridiculous, and the last thing that I want is to spend all of that time busting you out of prison just to have you kill yourself with alcohol poisoning.”

She decided that now wasn’t the time to mention how she’d considered suicide only a few weeks earlier.

Tom inhaled a deep breath through his nostrils and huffed it out rapidly. For a second he didn’t say anything, but then growled, “Leave me alone.”

“Fine,” she snapped. “Fine. I will. And I won’t be coming back in the morning to drag your arse back home, or to remind you who the bloody hell you are. Screw you.” She slapped a Muggle note of money on the counter, knowing that Tom hadn’t brought any with him, and then stormed out.

xxx

She went back to Hogwarts after that. Everyone crowded around her, smiling and assuming that she was happy. Reality spoke otherwise.

Now she didn't even bother to hide behind a smile to make them feel better. She gave her friends a blank, miserable look, and sloped off to her bedroom to curl up and feel sorry for herself.

"Is everything alright, Alden asks?" Grace said as she came down to get ready for bed. "And I ask, as well. You okay?"

"No," said Ginny grumpily.

"What happened?" Grace said the words delicately, as though afraid that there was some unknown taboo on Tom.

"He asked me why I'd bothered to get him out, and then ran off to the nearest pub to get himself totally wasted," Ginny said bleakly, cutting out the boring details like having him collapse and like him not taking her hand on the boat.

"Oh." Grace changed into her pyjamas and sat on the edge of the redhead's bed. "I'm sorry."

Ginny muttered, "So am I," and rolled over on her bed, so that she didn't have to talk to her anymore. She was being mean, but she wasn't in the mood to psycho-analyse everything.

"You know," said Grace softly from behind her, "you don't have to act like we're your enemies."

Ginny had promised not to tell anyone – it had slipped out with Philippa... but, rolling over to look at her friend again, she said quietly, "He asked me to marry him."

There was silence. Grace's eyebrows rose into her hairline. "And? What did you say?"

"...I said no."

"But... you love him."

Ginny looked sideways, not at anything, just... looking. Just for the sake of looking at something. "I know."

Then she rolled onto her other side, turning her back on her Grace completely now. The conversation, only finished a few seconds ago, replayed in her head, like pressing play on a video she'd only just seen.

He asked me to marry him. What did you say? I said no. But you love him. I know.

Why had she said no? She knew that there had been reasons why, when she had said it, at least. However, she couldn't remember those reasons... and she certainly couldn't remember if that had been good reasons. She couldn't remember if those reasons were worth it – worth the possibility that he might never ask her again.

xxx

A/N: Sorry that it's so short. Hey, guess what? There's a guy in the sixth form at my school (that's like... 11th and 12th graders, to you people who don't live in England) who looks like Tom! Hehehe. He's really tall and he has that sort of shaped face and dark eyes and dark sort of wavy hair and he never smiles. :D...He's hot.

I've just realised that I think that all of my reviewers are girls. Out of curiosity, are there any male readers still here? If so, high-five! I love you. But not really.

I put my school IT password as 'riddle'. Bwahaha.

Please review!

Next Time:

Her Potions grades gradually improved as she focused on her studies almost viciously. It took her mind off other things that made her doubt and hurt inside.

Then, the object of her doubt and hurting appeared in the Entrance Hall doorway after dinner.

“Tom,” she said, puzzled. “What are you doing here?”

He smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “I need to talk to you.”

Xxx

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Cracks In The Concrete

He asked me to marry him. What did you say? I said no. But you love him. I know.

Why had she said no? She knew that there had been reasons why, when she had said it, at least. However, she couldn't remember those reasons... and she certainly couldn't remember if that had been good reasons. She couldn't remember if those reasons were worth it – worth the possibility that he might never ask her again.

xxx

Take back everything you ever said

You never meant a word of it

Two days had passed since the eleventh of January, and no-one was sure of anything. Alden wasn't sure if his little brother would survive, as two days had been the day of Dominic's surgery and he was waiting impatiently for the results. Philippa wasn't sure if her relationship with Alden would survive. Grace wasn't sure if she wanted to survive if Philippa and Alden did survive. Scott didn't know if he was surviving. And Ginny didn't know if life was worth surviving at all.

The school holidays had ended, and, with the NEWTs approaching, survival was about to get a lot harder.

Even Professor Ornella, the Herbology teacher, who was usually very laid-back, began to get very strict and would push more homework on them than ever.

Arithmancy was so difficult that Ginny wondered if she would stop trying. She was going to fail anyway. However, a strange determination that she didn't know the motivation for took over her, and she worked harder at the subject than ever.

Her Potions grades gradually improved as she focused on her studies almost viciously. It took her mind off other things that made her doubt and hurt inside.

Then, the object of her doubt and hurting appeared in the Entrance Hall doorway after dinner.

"Tom," she said, puzzled. "What are you doing here?"

He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "I need to talk to you."

"Er. Okay." She made an apologetic face. "Sorry, I have to go and deliver this to Professor Devin," she told him. "I'll be right back, unless it's quick enough for you to tell me first."

"No, it's quite... lengthy." For some reason, Tom wouldn't look at her while he said this. Then his eyes flashed back up to hers. "I'll wait by these steps here for you." He gestured with a twitch of his head towards the stairs behind him. "We can take a walk."

"Okay." Ginny smiled back at him. "Grace, Alden, Pippa, I'll see you later, alright? If you're going to meet outside the Slytherin common room again, then I'll see you there."

Because Philippa was a Ravenclaw, and therefore not allowed into the Slytherin House, they usually hung out in the dungeons, on the steps, just sitting there and chatting. It wasn't very comfortable, but it worked.

"See you," they called.

Ginny flashed a be-right-back grin at Tom, and hurried up the main, sweeping staircase towards Professor Devin's office. Despite her carefree attitude, she was wondering with some anxiety why Tom wanted to talk to her, something that he couldn't say in a letter or in the Floo. Something that he'd walked across the vast Hogwarts grounds in the darkening evening for.

"Professor?" Ginny called, knocking lightly on the door marked Michelangelo Devin, once she reached the fourth-floor, where his

office was. "Professor Devin, sir, it's me. Ginny Peregrine. I have some folders for you, from Headmaster Dippet."

She said this while constantly reminding herself to be polite to teachers. Due to the fact that Devin was a young teacher, and rather relaxed about things, she sometimes forgot that, and became a bit rude to him.

"Come in, Miss Peregrine."

Ginny pushed through the door and held out the set of folders that she held. "I think they're in relation to the NEWTs or something. I don't know. They're from Dippet – Headmaster Dippet, that is, I mean," she amended.

"Ah, yes. Thank you, Miss Peregrine, I've been waiting for these." Devin smiled at her. "Is that all?"

"Oh." An idea struck her, and she grinned evilly. "Say, do you think you could drop a hint to your son that Grace Hartwin's interested?"

Professor Devin's eyebrows rose and a bemused smirk twisted the corners of his lips. "Well. I'll see."

"Thank you, sir, and sorry to be... yeah. Sorry." Ginny smiled sheepishly. There wasn't really an adjective for someone who went around asking out a teacher's son for her friend.

"It's fine." Professor Devin shooed her away with one hand. "Please, Miss Peregrine. I do have work to do."

"Yes, sir," she said humbly, and hurried out of the classroom.

She moved quickly down the stairs to the Entrance Hall, skipping three stairs at a time, her footsteps ringing loudly every time they struck the marble steps.

Tom was waiting outside, by the Entrance Hall doors, true to his word.

Ginny skipped out to meet him. "Hello," she chirped. She noticed that the sky was changing steadily from the orange of a sunset to the dark, endless blue of night. "Don't make me miss curfew," she teased, "or I'll be angry. And you won't like me when I'm angry."

Tom, quiet, didn't respond to this. She wondered what was going through his head. He turned and walked around the castle, her following a few steps behind.

"It's a nice night," Ginny said, attempting to make conversation. "Going to be lots of stars."

"Yes," Tom said, sounding as though he wasn't listening, though there wasn't really anything else to attract his attention. She wondered again for what echoed inside that skull of his. Abruptly, he stopped. Not so much a walk, then, as going away from prying ears. Interesting.

"Right." Ginny turned to him, folding her arms across her chest and looked up at him expectantly. "So what was it that you wanted to tell me?"

Tom stuck his hands in his pockets. "Yes, of course." He looked reluctant, and uncomfortable. He wouldn't meet her eyes. "It's – well, it's just that – I don't... I don't think that it's... working, as such."

She stared at him. "Hm?"

Not the most intelligent answer, but it wasn't her fault. For some reason her brain had shut down after decoding what he meant by it. What wasn't working. And now she couldn't think clearly.

"You understood me – please don't make this difficult," Tom told her, seeming almost annoyed with her. She couldn't tell. That face, open for so long, was a closed door and she had no clues as to what was going on inside his head.

He's breaking-

Those words sounded like something stupid out of a film; some dippy blonde gasping, 'Are you breaking up with me?', as though it wasn't already obvious.

Yet Ginny wanted to follow in their footsteps, just to check if this was real, if this was actually happening.

It couldn't be happening.

"I-" Ginny tried to make normal words come out, but her efforts failed pathetically. "You asked me to marry you."

Tom shrugged.

The careless gesture should have killed her, but she couldn't feel anything.

"You know that you're the first person I've ever been with. Would have wanted to marry your first boyfriend?" He lifted one eyebrow at her. It was amazing how he didn't seem to give a damn. "Similarly," Tom continued, almost boredly, "I hadn't really felt anything for anyone before, and I didn't understand the depth of my feelings. I liked you – a lot – and I assumed that I was in love with you."

"You don't love me?" Ginny was almost proud of herself. Her voice didn't crack or come out a few octaves too high. In fact, she sounded fairly uninterested. She hoped.

"No. I'm sorry."

"Oh." Ginny swallowed. "Okay."

Tom looked straight at her. She might have thought that he would be concerned, but he showed nothing. "Are you alright?"

"No."

"I said that I was sorry."

"I know."

What was that saying? If you give a little love, you might get a little love of your own.

It was enough to make her laugh. Yeah, right.

All of her life, all she'd ever done was give love, more and more love, as she fell harder and faster for the one who she, blinded by adoration, thought was perfect.

He sighed; the first sign of him feeling anything. "Are you sure that you're okay with this?" he verified.

Ginny laughed without humour. "It's not as if I have a choice, is it? I can't just say, 'no, Tom, you're not leaving, you're staying with me forever and ever'." She winced inwardly as soon as the words were out. Her voice was slowly slipping from control, and she hadn't meant to show that she wanted to stay with him forever.

"Astronomy is really interesting," she informed him. "See that star there? That's called Ariel. It symbolises good luck and wealth... it makes a formation with six other stars that looks like a big shoe. Or at least, I think so. Professor Rowney says that it looks like a spade, but it's a bit of a weirdly-shaped spade if it is... and it can only be seen once every two-hundred years," Ginny finished.

"Hm. So this is the one and only time we'll ever see it," mused Tom.

"Well, unless you live to be two-hundred-and-seventeen, then yeah, basically," Ginny said softly.

"I might," said Tom, and stretched his mouth in a yawn.

"And we could the longest-standing relationship that the world has ever seen," Ginny said with a smile.

Tom looked at her, his eyes glowing again with that emotion that Ginny couldn't place, as well as a sort of hopeful pride. "Would you stay with me for long?" he asked quietly.

She hadn't thought of it that way. She curled both of her arms around one of his and rested her head on his shoulder. "Definitely."

"I suppose not." Tom looked up at the sky, dark, cruelly dotted with stars in irony of the last time she had mentioned that she wanted to stay with him forever.

Ginny took a deep breath and laughed shakily. "You know what?" she asked, smiling bravely, despite how a feeling was slowly building up inside her... like a longing, an urge, a desperate want to collapse to the ground and not move. "I mean, thank God that I didn't... but you know, I actually wanted to marry you."

The look that crossed Tom's face was devastating. She didn't know what it was, but it hurt like fire, hot and painful inside her. He stared at her, his mouth hanging slightly open. "What?"

Now the tears were stinging her eyes. "I wanted to marry you. More than anything. I still have no idea why I said no. Maybe it was because I could see this coming."

He was silent. He swallowed, ripping his eyes away and staring at the ground. She could still see flickers of that emotion on his face – that strange emotion – but slowly it was fading... by force. He wouldn't let himself show her that feeling. Whatever it was.

"Aren't you going to kill me?" Ginny asked flatly, destroying the brief, tense silence, twining a strand of red hair around her finger.

Tom looked at her in alarm, again letting slip that there were emotions lurking under his icy façade.

"I mean, I know about your-" (she lifted her fingers for inverted commas) "-supernatural problems. Wasn't your plan to get rid of me and hide the evidence?"

He flinched. "That's not funny," he said sharply, eyes flashing, jaw tight, and for one insane moment, she thought that she saw pain in those eyes – something that cared for her – maybe loved her –

But that ridiculous, because if he loved her, then he wouldn't be seeking this moment to destroy her, would he?

"I'm sorry," she muttered, not sure why she was apologising.

"So am I. Can't we be friends?"

"No," she said firmly, horrified to find that her voice was shaking. "No, we can't. I know that this is what you want, and that's fine – but it's not what I want, because I do know what love is, and... and I love you. I love you almost crazily. I wanted to marry you. I love you, Tom. And I'm not going to be your friend, hanging out with you like nothing has happened, chatting to you with your arm around some other girl as though you aren't my everything. So... this is it."

That was too much information. She wasn't supposed to let him know that she cared...

"...Okay." Those two syllables sounded slightly strained, as though it took a painful amount of effort to force them out. Tom couldn't meet her eyes.

"Okay," she repeated, feeling like a dumb echo. "Okay." There it was again. "Look, I'm going to make this easy for you; you're never going to see me again."

He had nothing to say to this. He was staring up at the sky; she couldn't see his eyes. He wouldn't look down at her.

She took a deep breath. "...Bye, Riddle," she said quietly, using the cold, impersonal surname that she hadn't felt the need to use for over a year now. It hadn't hurt her the way that she'd thought this break up would, considering that she loved him.

She didn't turn and run, as instinct screamed at her to. She walked away slowly. She'd thought that this would hurt. She was surprised at how strong she was. But cracks in the concrete on which she walked on reminded her that no matter how strong you are, you fall apart some times.

Ginny was ten steps away when the concrete that she made of cracked. The agony rushed in so quickly that she gasped, "Oh!" and clapped a hand to her mouth. Then the tears came, streaming down her face as painful reality hit home.

She didn't run. She walked away slowly, back to the Entrance Hall. And it killed her, because that gave him approximately ten minutes of watching her retreating back in which to call her back.

And he didn't.

xxx

A/N: Hey, admit it, you knew it was coming. You knew that he was going to dump her, deep down. What with all his stupid insecurities. See? I came up with all the same Twilight ideas before I read Twilight. It's annoying. I've done a New Moon. Mergh. My itunes keeps freezing. It's annoying. I'm singing happily, and then it just stops and leaves me by myself. :(

I'm starting a new TomxGinny which has entirely different perspectives. It's PopularAndEvil!Tom, which should be interesting for me. I'm not sure if I can do his evilness, but I'm going to try.

Next Time:

Tom calculated that Ginevra would finish dinner at approximately eight-thirty. He was there by eight-twenty, just in case she came out early for some reason or another, and he missed her. He needed to talk to her.

He had to do this.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty: I Lied

Ginny was ten steps away when the concrete that she made of cracked. The agony rushed in so quickly that she gasped, “Oh!” and clapped a hand to her mouth. Then the tears came, streaming down her face as painful reality hit home.

She walked away slowly, back to the Entrance Hall. And it killed her, because that gave Tom approximately ten minutes of watching her retreating back in which to call her back. And he didn’t.

Xxx

It was just a split-decision made in anger

A stupid choice that will change your life forever

Was it worth it - ...no

Tom calculated that Ginevra would finish dinner at approximately eight-thirty. He was there by eight-twenty, just in case she came out early for some reason or another, and he missed her. He needed to talk to her.

He had to do this.

I can’t – I can’t – I can’t –

She’ll never believe me anyway, he realised with some despair as he appeared with a crack by the gates to the Hogwarts grounds. I’ll just be standing there like an idiot, insisting that I don’t love her, and she’ll reply every time, ‘yes, you do. You’re insane about me. You would do anything for me. You can’t live without me.’

He ignored this, and waited for her to come out of dinner.

Ginevra was chatting to Philips, Hartwin, and Decrow when she came out of the Great Hall at eight-forty-two. She noticed him immediately. “Tom.” She looked confused, but not annoyed, at him being there. “What you doing here?”

With a lot of difficulty, Tom forced a smile. "I need to talk to you."

"Er." She blinked. "Okay." Then an apologetic grimace twisted her beautiful face. "Sorry, I have to go and deliver this to Professor Devin. I'll be right back, unless it's quick enough for you to tell me first."

Go to Devin. It's not quick. It takes a long time for me to pull my heart out.

"No, it's quite... lengthy." He took a deep breath and forced himself to look at her. "I'll wait by these steps here for you. We can talk a walk."

Pain was already building up in his stomach for what he was about to do... but it didn't matter what he felt. She had to be happy. This was what she wanted. This was good – for her, at least. All that he had to do was pretend that it was good for him too.

"Okay. Grace, Alden, Pippa, I'll see you later, alright?" She flashed a smile and then turned to her friends. It was apparent how sick Tom felt inside because that smile didn't dazzle him in the slightest. It could have been any other smile on any other face. "If you're going to meet outside the Slytherin common room again, then I'll see you there."

Grinning at her companions' farewells, and tossing a similar grin back at him to say that she'd return in a moment, she ran away up the stairs.

Go, Ginevra. Don't come back down. Don't go to the steps. Don't listen to what I have to say. Don't believe me.

But you have to.

Tom stared after her, torn. Then, once the room was quiet, except for the faint remaining chatter floating from the Great Hall of those who had not yet finished their food, he turned and moved towards the steps by the main doors.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

You... feel... nothing...

He closed his dark eyes and took a deep breath, his whole face turning into the perfect mask of not feeling anything at all. He didn't care. Not in the slightest. He pushed down what he actually was feeling to the pit of his stomach, where it could be fairly easily ignored.

Ginevra approached him skipping. She smiled again. "Hello!" Her amazing hazel eyes flashed sideways to the sky behind him. It was getting dark. This had better work. If she refused to believe him, then this whole thing would be a waste of time... and pain... "Don't make me miss curfew, or I'll be angry. And you won't like me when I'm angry."

Tom vaguely recognised the lines from some supernatural comic. He didn't know which one. He wasn't one for comics.

He walked away from the Entrance Hall, every molecule in his being working towards keeping his face flat.

Clearing her throat awkwardly, Ginevra said, "It's a nice night. Going to be lots of stars."

"Yes..."

You can do this. Breathe. Breathe.

We're far enough now. I can't walk and break up with her at the same time.

Stop. Breathe.

"Right." Ginevra turned to look up at him, crossing her arms. "So what was it that you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, of course." Calm and composed. You don't give a damn. Calm and composed. Don't look at her. "It's – well, it's just that-" It wasn't working as he'd planned... "I don't... I don't that it's... working, as such."

Her only response was a “hm?”

Pain was stabbing through him, and it was becoming hard to keep his emotions squashed down. “You understood me – please don’t make this difficult.”

An irritation was flooding his thoughts. She wouldn’t, would she? She wouldn’t refuse to believe him? Or worse, would she pretend not to understand? Would he have to spell it out for her?

“I-” Ginevra’s voice cracked, and she stopped to try again. “You asked me to marry you.”

I knew that was coming back to haunt me.

Get out of that one, genius.

Tom had no answer. He merely shrugged.

Yes, I asked you to marry me. And you said no.

DON’T THINK ABOUT THAT.

He raised an eyebrow at her. “You know that you’re the first person I’ve ever been with. Would have wanted to marry your first boyfriend?” Calm and composed. Calm and composed. “Similarly, I hadn’t really felt anything for anyone before, and I didn’t understand the depth of my feelings. I liked you – a lot – and I assumed that I was-”

Here he struggled.

He could do this. He’d gone too far to go back now.

“-in love with you.” He forced the words past his lips. He hoped that the slight tremble on the word love would escape her.

“You don’t love me?” She didn’t sound as if she cared at all. Something broke inside Tom. He’d imagined the sort of scenario

where she collapsed, insisted that she did love him, that she did want to marry him... but it didn't seem as though it was going to happen.

It was too late to go back now anyway.

"No." Such blasphemy. "I'm sorry." That was the least he could say.

"Oh. Okay."

Calm and composed. She doesn't give a damn about you. You don't give a damn about her.

For the first time, he looked down at her. Those eyes urged him to tell the truth, to break down, to plead with her to give him another chance – but that was stupid. That was weak. That was what he wanted. And this was all about her right now. She wanted... she wanted this. "Are you alright?"

"No."

What? If he hadn't been holding every emotion back, he would have frowned. What did she mean?

We were friends first. We can never be friends after this. That's what she's upset about. That's all.

A small part of him said desperately, she could be upset because-

She's not. If she loved you, she would have agreed to marry you, wouldn't she?

"I said that I was sorry."

"I know."

Against his control, he sighed. "Are you sure that you're okay with this?"

To his surprise, she laughed. He motionlessly braced himself for the mockery that would come next. 'Why would I not be okay?' Then, the

even larger surprise was when she said, “It’s not as if I have a choice, is it? I can’t just say, ‘no, Tom, you’re not leaving,” (her voice broke) “you’re staying with me forever and ever’.”

What – but – I don’t understand –

“I suppose not.” He looked up at the sky, counting stars. He needed to concentrate on his mask. If she saw any glimpse of the confusion swirling through his eyes then she’d realise that he wasn’t serious... that he loved her more than anything... that this was like watching himself burn alive...

“You know what?” Ginevra laughed again. “I mean, thank God that I didn’t... but you know, I actually wanted to marry you.”

Five words ripped him into pieces.

Wait – what?

The agony burning through him was like acid. “What?” He couldn’t help but stare. This wasn’t right. This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. She wasn’t supposed to still love him. She...

OH GOD.

He wasn’t supposed to throw her away when she loved him!

She can’t love me. It’s simply not possible. She said no. She kissed Terby. She... she... no...

There were tears in her eyes.

NO! NO, NO, NO!

“I wanted to marry you.”

PAIN.

“More than anything.”

AGONY.

"I still have no idea why I said no."

He wanted to stumble backwards and fall over. He wanted to collapse and never get up. He wanted to be sick. This wasn't how it was supposed to work! NO.

"Maybe it was because I could see this coming."

NO! NO, YOU STUPID, STUPID GIRL! No...

I LOVE YOU!

Take her back. Take her back. Beg. Plead. Grovel.

Anything.

It's too late. I can't... I just... I can't...

He curled his hands into tight fists and tore his eyes away from her. Then, breathing hard, he flattened his pain... flattened every thought of how stupid he was...

"Aren't you going to kill me?"

Startled, Tom looked up at her.

"I mean, I know about your supernatural problems. Wasn't your plan to get rid of me and hide the evidence?"

How dare you. You have no idea how much it hurts trying to stop myself from killing you all the time. Almost every second I'm with you, there's this nagging in the back of my head, there's this hunger in the bottom of my stomach, there's this urge to rip you to pieces... and I don't! Because I LOVE you. And... and...

"That's not funny," he snarled, every squashed emotion flaring back up ten times stronger.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled.

Don't say that. Please don't say that. Don't be sorry. Why are you sorry when I'm hurting you?

"So am I." Tom couldn't think of anything to summarise how to say that he was dying on the inside because of this – anything else would tell her that he loved her. And despite how desperately, how insanely he needed to tell her... he couldn't.

It was too late.

"Can't we be friends?" he tried. If they were friends, then he would still get to be close to her. He would still have the chance of getting her back.

"No." Her voice was shuddering with tears. "No, we can't. I know that this is what you want, and that's fine – but it's not what I want, because I do know what love is, and... and I love you. I love you almost crazily. I wanted to marry you. I love you, Tom. And I'm not going to be your friend, hanging out with you like nothing has happened, chatting to you with your arm around some other girl as though you aren't my everything. So... this is it."

The burning agony that he was going through wasn't fair. It was making his eyes sting. He was glad that it was dark, and that she couldn't see that.

"...Okay."

He forced the words out.

"Okay... okay." Ginevra swallowed. "Look, I'm going to make this easy for you; you're never going to see me again."

Verbally, he said nothing, looking up at the sky so that she couldn't see his pain. The mask had long since slipped. Mentally, however, he screamed.

NO. COME BACK. PLEASE. I'M AN IDIOT. I – I LOVE YOU. I'VE HARDLY EVER TOLD YOU PROPERLY... LESS THAN TWICE IN THE PAST YEAR... AND I SHOULD HAVE... BUT I LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU.

Tom swallowed. If she could handle this, then so could he. Maybe it was healthy for them to be apart. Maybe it was bad for them to be so dependent on one another, and they needed this. Maybe.

Maybe not.

Ginevra took a deep breath. "...Bye, Riddle."

She walked away.

He was so eternally grateful, in one way, and so devastated, in another way, that when she walked away, she didn't turn back to look at him.

If she had, then she would have turned to see him crumple to his knees and silently gasp, 'come back... I love you... please...' as he stared at her retreating back.

A single tear slid down his icy cheek.

This was all his fault.

He'd destroyed her.

He'd destroyed himself.

Kneeling in the cold dirt, Tom curled his fingers into fists so tight around his hair that blood trickled down his wrist. "I love you," he whispered after her, but his voice was so broken that even a whisper wasn't audible.

Ginevra didn't look at him over her shoulder, much less turn around. She didn't come back. She slowly disappeared through the Entrance Hall doors; disappeared from his life.

Finally, his voice box kicked into action, ready to scream, 'I LIED! I LOVE YOU!' if he had to. However, he didn't, because she was already gone, and he wouldn't have dared to anyway.

xxx

A/N: Wah. How sad. Diddums. Oh well. Lar-di-dar. I learnt in choir how to sing Carima Burana... or something like that. You know, that dramatic Latin song that goes: DUN DUN DUN DUN! DUN DUN DUN DUN DUN! DUN DUN DUN DUUUUN DUUUUN DUN-DUN! ...Or maybe not. Hehe. Either way, please review!

Next Time:

Unlocking the drawer, she pulled out a neglected, dusty photograph. Fresh, painful tears burnt her eyes until hers and his frozen smiles blurred out of focus, and then, with a loud, sharp cry, she threw it across the room as hard as she could, crying harder when she heard the echoing shatter of glass.

Xxx

Press Play

They saw her silhouette at the top of the stairs as she started to come down.

“Hey, Ginny,” said Alden.

“What did Riddle want?” Philippa asked.

“I bet I know what he wanted,” Grace said, her voice teasingly suggestive, nudging the others with her elbow and laughing loudly. “Eh?”

Then Ginny stepped into the light and they saw her face, pale, swaying like she was about to faint, devastated by tears and running eyeliner.

“Oh my God, Ginny, what’s wrong?” Grace asked in alarm, standing up and taking hold of her wrists to hold her still so that she could take care of her. “What’s happened?”

“Let go,” Ginny cried, and then her voice cracked, and the sobs came. She wrenched away and ran down the corridor, disappearing into the Slytherin common room.

She raced past the people in the large room, running straight into the dormitory and slamming the door behind her. Luckily no-one else was in there. She threw herself onto her bed and hid her eyes in her pillow, pressing it fiercely to her face so that no sound could be heard and then screaming.

Something was on fire inside her bedside table. Unlocking the drawer, she pulled out a neglected, dusty photograph. Fresh, painful tears burnt her eyes until hers and his frozen smiles blurred out of focus, and then, with a loud, sharp cry, she threw it across the room as hard as she could, crying harder when she heard the echoing shatter of glass.

Grace had been right. “Ginny, you’re going to hate me saying this, but don’t you think that maybe... maybe, you know, you’ve stretched your

relationship as far as it can go... like a rubber band... and maybe the rubber's about to snap?" The rubber had snapped.

xxx

Within a day and a half, the whole school knew. Everyone knew that Ginevra Peregrine had struggled and fought to get Tom, her beloved, her one true love, out of Azkaban... and then he ditched her, not even a week after coming out.

What hurt more was the passing of February the second.

The day that he'd kissed her a year ago, in the library, in front of hundreds of people, showing that she was worth more to him than the suspicious gazes of watchers.

February the third.

The day that he'd asked her out.

This, here, now, was more agonising than when he'd been sent to prison. Because this... this was his choice. He wanted to do this.

She didn't want to fall to pieces, but she fell apart anyway. Yet, for some reason, this time she didn't even think about going up to the tallest Eastern tower again and jumping. It didn't even cross her mind. There was nothing but pain.

One advantage was that her grades were all excellent now. Three weeks of avoiding reality, with nothing better to do than homework and revision.

On the way to the library, she met Scott. That was the last thing that she wanted. Because he wanted this. He would be his happiest now. All that he had to do was comfort her, and bang – he was in there. He wouldn't seem to care if she was in pieces.

Or worse. Worse was that he'd be kind, be sweet. And she wouldn't be able to handle that.

“Hey, Ginny,” he said.

She ignored him and walked straight past. He didn’t say anything to this response, just continued on his way. And she continued on hers. She was grateful to him for this. She didn’t want arguments, and she didn’t want sympathy. She could deal with this by herself.

Bernard Terby, on the other hand, wasn’t so considerate. The day after Ginny met Scott as she went to library, she met Bernard as she walked to Charms with Grace and Alden.

“Hey,” he drawled. “Say, I heard a lil’ somethin’ about you bein’ all single and-”

In a flash, her wand was drawn and pointed between his eyes. “Get away from me,” she whispered. Her voice was shaking, and she didn’t care. She was more dangerous this way. She was unstable. She was unstoppable. “And I do recommend it, because this time it’s not the Bat-Bogey Hex that’s on the tip of my tongue, it’s the freakin’ Killing Curse, and don’t tell that I wouldn’t dare, because shit yeah, I would.”

“Ginny-”

“YOU HAVE THREE SECONDS,” she screamed, tightening her grip on her wand. “Three – two – one-”

“Ginny-“ This time it was the outbursts of her friends, wrapping their arms around hers and dragging her back as best as they could, but she was stronger.

“Avada k-”

“GINNY!” And without a single hesitation, Alden hit her around the face with everything he had. “Stop it!”

She glared at him, but she could feel tears starting up. Her face was stinging and it hurt a lot, but the pain wasn’t what was making her start to cry.

Sighing, Alden wrapped his arms around her. "I'm sorry," he told her. "I really am."

He looked straight at her. She might have thought that he would be concerned, but he showed nothing. "Are you alright?"

"No."

"I said that I was sorry."

"I know."

She twisted away, the agony starting up so fiercely that it wasn't helping her to shut down her tear-ducts – it was setting them on fire. The single tear that escaped was like dropping magma on to ice. It burned so that she swept it away instantly, yet it left a scar on her freckled face.

That was the only time that she allowed herself to break down.

xxx

Ginny was wandering aimlessly through the castle on a Thursday. It was a free period. Her homework was done. She didn't feel like revising. She couldn't stomach talking with Philippa, Grace and Alden 'just like old times', as they put it.

And that left her here. Wandering through the labyrinth of corridors and secret passageways of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, trying to get herself lost. Trying not to think.

Heather Tristanebury came around the corner, and Ginny walked straight into her.

"Oh! Hello!" said Heather, beaming. "I haven't seen you in a while. How are you?"

"Hello," said Ginny. She avoided the how are you question and hoped that the eleven-year-old wouldn't notice.

“Are you busy?” Heather asked.

“Yeah.”

“Oh. Okay. Are you going somewhere?”

“Yeah.” Ginny’s voice was flat and uninterested.

“I can come with you, if you want. Where are you going?”

“Nowhere.”

Heather frowned, looking confused. “I don’t...” she shook her head, as if thinking that her puzzlement didn’t really matter. “When are you going to come and help me see Myrtle?”

Ginny recalled that promise. She’d forgotten about it. “Never.” She was being horrible, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. She attempted an apology anyway. “Sorry, Heather.” Then she walked away.

Eating seemed sort of pointless now. What the point of swallowing food when she only felt so sick that she would throw up later? She drank sometimes – her throat burned without liquid – but that was the same. She drank water, as plain as possible. Nutrition made her feel unwell. Her point was proven when she fainted in Astronomy after braving lunch, knocking her telescope over and making everyone laugh at her. That was the last time, she decided, that she was going to eat. Food was stupid.

Two days later, in a similar free period to the one in which she met Heather, she bumped into Scott.

“Hey,” he said, smiling kindly. She hated his sympathy. “Did you finish the Potions homework?”

“Yeah.” Despite herself, she was glad for one thing he’d done - he hadn’t asked how she was. How are you, everyone simpered. How do you freakin’ think was what she wanted to scream at them.

“Did you happen to get question eight? I’m totally confused,” he continued.

“I don’t know. I don’t memorise my homework answers,” she said dully.

“Okay.” Scott paused, seeming to hesitate on his next words. “Ginny... if you need anyone to talk to, then-”

“I don’t want to talk to anyone,” she snapped, her emotions firing through her blank façade, “and especially not you.” She whirled away from him so fast that she almost fell over, and disappeared through a nearby tapestry, where she could kick the wall in private.

People began to avoid her. She didn’t blame them. She was being a cold, insensitive bitch to be honest. She didn’t care. It made her feel better – by one iota. She would have avoided herself. The lack of people bugging into her life with their questions and snide comments was a good thing, as far as she was concerned.

Ginny went down to the Slytherin common room during lunch. Other people went up to eat. She, on the other hand, went back to her dormitory to revise for the NEWTs. She didn’t give a damn how useless everything else was – she was going to ace those exams. She could absorb herself in studying, and other thoughts couldn’t invade.

As she opened the door to the common room, muttering, “Tanith”, the new password, she heard voices. She heard her name.

Keeping perfectly silent, she pressed herself to the wall in the doorway and listened.

“-and I’m really worried about her, Alden.” It was Grace speaking. “When was the last time that you saw her eat something?”

“...A week ago,” Alden replied.

“Yeah, and then she passed out in Astronomy that day! When she woke up, she excused herself to go to the bathroom, looking like she

was going to be sick.” Grace sounded tearful. “She won’t keep any food down. She won’t have anything except water. You’ve seen how thin she is.”

Ginny stared down at herself. She wasn’t really thin... she’d lost some extra weight, sure... not that much... she inspected her arm. Okay, so you could see the bone, but that wasn’t such a big deal.

Alden sighed. “Grace, I need to tell you something. Last time, when he got sent to prison, she tried to jump off the Eastern tower.” There was a gasp. “Pippa made her promise that she’d never do it again, and Ginny’s been true to her word. But if that’s how depressed she was then, when he was forced to leave her, imagine what she’s like now that it was Riddle’s choice.”

Agony shredded her stomach at the mention of his name, and she made her appearance in the doorway.

“Thanks for your concern,” she said coldly, looking at them through narrowed eyes, “but I assure you, I’m fine.”

“I can see that,” said Alden calmly, raising his eyebrows slightly.

“I don’t eat because I’m not hungry,” Ginny told them furiously. “I don’t drink anything except water because I don’t really like the taste of anything else. When I tried to jump that day, I realised that it was stupid. Suicide, full-stop, is stupid. I’m not going to do it. If you’d prefer, I could jump off the tower and make all of your lives easier, but if not, then shut the hell up about me.”

“You’re right,” said Alden. “You’re not trying to kill yourself through jumping from a massive height. You’re being subtle about it this time. You’re just going to let yourself starve.”

“I’m not!” Ginny snarled.

“Yes, you are! We’re not stupid!” Grace shouted, speaking up for the first time since she’d come in, tears pouring down her round face like a waterfall. “So stop it!”

“You’re going to end up in hospital,” Alden told her softly.

“No, I’m not,” said Ginny stubbornly, and the conversation was finished.

The next people to approach her about something after Scott was Grace again.

“Do you want to go to a party with us?” Grace asked as they came out of Charms. “We thought it might cheer you up.”

“Who’s us?” Ginny asked.

“Me and Alden and Pippa. And you.”

Ginny sighed and smiled. “Yes, Grace. I would love to come to a party with you – if you drag my cold, lifeless carcass under the disco lights.”

Grace’s face dropped a mile, and her shoulders slumped. Her eyes had lit up when Ginny had said yes, but of course, it would only be sarcasm.

It was a cheerful, festive sort of way to start 1960.

xxx

On February the thirteenth, five weeks after he had met her in the Entrance Hall and brought her world crashing down around her, Grace and Philippa ambushed her. They grabbed her, Stupefied her, tied her up in ropes, taped her mouth shut, and then started to play Barbie with her, making-up her face and doing her hair.

Ginny tried to demand, “What do you think your doing?”, only with a little more colour in it, but it came out as whuffumukelldoofinudoo, and the other girls only laughed at her.

Then they Immobilised her, took off the ropes, and dressed her in a pink skirt and a white top. Then they removed the tape and the spells.

“What the hell is going on?” Ginny yelled angrily. “I do not appreciate being your guinea-pig for cosmetics!”

“You’re coming to a rave with us,” Grace told her. “Remember Alden’s New Year’s Resolution? I resolve to go to a rave with you guys. ‘You guys’. Me... and you. You have to be there. Remember my New Year’s Resolution? I resolve to ask out Edouard Devin. I did, and he’s meeting us there. You’ve already fulfilled your resolution, so now it’s our turn. You can’t complain. Just because you want to ruin your life doesn’t mean that you’re going to ruin ours.”

“Yeah,” Philippa chimed in at the end. “Cause that’s unfairstville.”

“I’m not coming.”

“Yes, you are,” Grace said fiercely. “And if we have to honour what you said and ‘drag your cold, lifeless carcass under the disco lights’, so to speak, then we will.” She raised her wand threateningly.

“Fine.” Ginny scowled. “Can I at least wear black?”

“No.”

“Green?”

“...Okay.”

“Dark green?”

“Fine. But we’re choosing what you wear, and we’re doing your make-up,” Philippa cackled evilly. And then they attacked her.

xxx

Ginny wore a dark green swing-skirt and a wrap-around top in black. Her eyes were outlined in both colours, and her hair was curled. She wore silver slippers on her feet, and silver bangles that she didn’t own clinked on her wrist.

“Hey, what happened to that necklace you got for your birthday? It’d go nicely,” said Philippa.

Pain firing through her, Ginny flinched back so suddenly that Grace stabbed a pin into her head.

“Oh. Sorry.” Philippa went red. “I didn’t know.”

“Stay still,” Grace complained, “or you’re going to get stabbed again. On purpose, this time.” Ginny kept very still and didn’t move an inch until the brunette said, “All done!” and pretended to dust off her hands.

“Let’s go!” Philippa cheered, and they skipped off to meet Alden in the Entrance Hall, Ginny three feet behind them, walking.

This was due to be the worst night of her life.

xxx

A/N: Oh, but it’s going to be worse than she knows... Haha, I’m such a retard. I put up a vote on my profile page for who Grace should end up with, and I was all upset because no-one was voting for Luke... and then I realised that I hadn’t put Luke in the story yet. XD I’m so stupid. He’s in the next chapter. He’s cool. Please review, it makes my day.

Next Time:

“Yeah,” Ginny muttered, who was staring forebodingly at the pint of beer in front of her. She wasn’t sure that she’d be able to do this. The strobe lights were making her head agony, and her stomach was retching viciously, and her eyes were fading in and out of focus. The stuffy air was making it hard to breathe.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty-Two: Sentenced To Hang

"You're coming to a rave with us," Grace told her. "Remember Alden's New Year's Resolution? I resolve to go to a rave with you guys. 'You guys'. Me... and you. You have to be there. Remember my New Year's Resolution? I resolve to ask out Edouard Devin. I did, and he's meeting us there. You've already fulfilled your resolution, so now it's our turn. You can't complain. Just because you want to ruin your life doesn't mean that you're going to ruin ours. And if we have to honour what you said and 'drag your cold, lifeless carcass under the disco lights', so to speak, then we will." She raised her wand threateningly.

"Let's go!" Philippa cheered, and they skipped off to meet Alden in the Entrance Hall, Ginny three feet behind them, walking.

This was due to be the worst night of her life.

xxx

When you love what you've lost

And you've lost what you love

How do you go back?

You don't.

The party wasn't in Hogsmeade, as Ginny had presumed. It wasn't even in Diagon Alley. It was in a dance-studio in London. It had been set up with flashing disco lights and a Muggle band called Basket Man twanging away on the electric guitars. The mirrors that lined the walls for the ballet classes, complete with wooden bars around them for practicing plies or whatever, shone silver in the light, reflecting a single strobe light everywhere.

"This should be good!" yelled Philippa over the music. "Come on, let's find Edouard!"

Alden was the one who found him. Edouard was by a portable bar that had been set up, shifting from foot to foot in time with the music, holding a beer. "Hey!" he called, grinning at Grace. "About time you arrived."

"Yeah, sorry," she apologised. "I had to blackmail my friend into coming." She laughed. Ginny scowled.

"Do you guys want a beer?" Edouard asked, gesturing towards the bar he was leaning on. "You're all of age, right?"

"Yeah," said Philippa.

"It doesn't taste at all like Butterbeer," the teacher's son warned them, quietly so that Muggles wouldn't think, huh, Butterbeer? "It's good though."

"Sounds okay to me," said Ginny, making an effort to liven up for her friends. Despite herself, she didn't want to spoil this for them. "I'll have one."

Edouard waved to the bartender. A glass of frothy beer was pushed towards them, and Ginny took it, forcing a smile. Warily, she drank some. She already knew what it tasted like – she'd had some before. However, it wasn't water, and she wasn't sure...

She instantly felt sick, but ignored it, and drank more.

The others looked delighted at the sight – she was finally drinking something! She ignored them.

After a while standing on the sidelines chatting, they threaded their way onto the dance-floor. Philippa and Alden had eyes only for each other; Grace and Edouard looked smitten... and Ginny was left dancing by herself.

"Hey, another ginger!" someone called behind her.

Turning, Ginny saw a redhead, her age, maybe older, grinning. "And I thought that I was the only ginger who knew how to party," he teased.

His hair was a lot lighter and fairer in colour than Ginny's scarlet, but the orange hue of his hair was obvious, and she couldn't help but smile back.

"Maybe you scare them away," she said coolly.

"It's possible," the young man shrugged.

"Was there something you wanted?" she asked, raising her voice over the screeching of a wild guitar solo. She could barely hear herself, let alone him.

"Not really. I just thought you looked kind of sad." He grinned again. "And because my best friend ordered me to come over here, because he fancies you." He twitched his head sideways at a blonde man at the edge of the dance-floor. "But I didn't say a word." He made a big dramatic thing out of putting a finger to his lips.

Even though drinking something that wasn't water was making Ginny feel violently ill, she laughed. "Right." She made an apologetic face. "Well, I hate to disappoint, but I'm here with my friends. I'm not looking for a date."

"Your opinion could change," the ginger said. "He's not bad, actually. Very attractive if you squint and tilt your head a little to the left."

Ginny laughed again. "I'll keep that in mind. But, sorry, that's a no."

"Any reason why?" he wondered. "Could it be connected with the sad face, perhaps?"

Her dancing slowed down. She swallowed. "Probably."

"Anything I can help with?"

She laughed for the third time – this time, bitterly, out of a total lack of humour. "I don't think so."

The young man made a face. "Alas, I tried." He extended a hand formally. "I'm Luke."

“Ginny.”

“Short for Virginia?”

“Ginevra, actually.”

“Italian. Nice.” He swept into a low bow, and began to declare majestically something in a foreign language with lots of allinis and arizzas, which she presumed was Italian. Then he straightened up and winked at her. “Didn’t understand a word I said, did you?”

“No.”

“Neither did I.” Luke stuck his hands in his pockets. “If any of that was real Italian, I should be given a Golden Globe Award.”

“You want to be an actor, then?” Ginny guessed.

He flashed his hands up in the air, as if to signify headlines. “Starring – the one and only Luke Glasscoe!” he closed his eyes as if in bliss. “Hell yeah, that’d be coolsville.” An instant later, he flashed open his blue eyes. “But enough about me,” he said melodramatically, “what’s your name?”

She raised her eyebrows. “I only just told you.”

“Oh, yes. Ginny, wasn’t it?” he verified. “Don’t mind me. I’m starting to think that I may be quite a bit more tipsy than I had originally assumed. Oh well. Can I buy you a drink?”

“Your friend won’t be pleased.”

“He never is.” Luke led her off the dance-floor to the bar. “Two beers, please.”

“How many have you had?” Ginny asked him. “I’ll make this easy. A) zero to three. B) Four to ten. Or C) All of the above, multiplied by ten.”

“Surprisingly,” Luke said, passing her beer to her and taking a sip from his own, “I think I only fall into the A category.”

“Really?” Ginny drank some of her beer. She wanted to be sick so badly, and her head started to sway. “I reckon I’m definitely a C.”

“I’m going to interpret that as sarcasm,” said Luke, smiling wryly.

Suddenly Grace appeared beside them. “Hi,” she said cheerfully, blue eyes wide and sparkling in a way that made Ginny suspicious. Very suspicious. “I’m Grace. Ginny’s friend.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Luke,” he said nonchalantly. “Ginny’s other friend.”

Grace giggled. “He has red hair like you!” she squealed to Ginny.

Ginny gave her a withering look. “Let me guess. Within three minutes of noticing that I’m talking to someone, you plan my entire life out with him. Am I right?”

Luke looked extremely amused; Grace nodded, still giggling maniacally.

“Listen to this,” Ginny told Luke. “It’s actually quite funny.” She turned back to Grace. “Where are we going to live?”

The answer was immediate. “Godric’s Hollow.”

There was a flash of a distant memory that stung faintly, like when someone hit their funny bone, but Ginny ignored it. “What house number?”

“Twenty-three.”

“Why?”

“Because two divided by three is zero point six-six-six, and six-six-six is the devil’s number, and everyone knows that the devil has ginger hair,” said Grace.

Ginny stared at her. Grace didn't even do Arithmancy! "Thanks," she grumbled. "Now. How many children are we going to have?"

"Fourteen!" Grace squealed happily, and Luke began to laugh.

"I like her," he said. "She's cool."

"Hm." Ginny raised her eyebrows. "You could call her that. My preferred word for her is 'insane'."

"Hey, you got more beer without us," complained Philippa, coming up behind them. "Has Grace told you your life-story yet?" she asked of Luke.

"Yes, she has," Luke chuckled, and introduced himself. Alden, Edouard and Philippa followed his example, and another round of beers was bought.

"Nothing quite like beer," said Edouard with a grin.

"Yeah," Ginny muttered, who was staring forebodingly at the pint of beer in front of her. She wasn't sure that she'd be able to do this. The strobe lights were making her head agony, and her stomach was retching viciously, and her eyes were fading in and out of focus. The stuffy air was making it hard to breathe.

"Ginny, are you okay?" Alden asked.

"...Don't feel well," she muttered.

Alden and Grace exchanged a quick look, understanding that it was drinking something that wasn't water – something with nutrition in – that was causing it. Grace quickly moved forwards (she wanted to be a Healer) and held the back of her hand to Ginny's forehead.

Almost instantly, she yelped and whipped her hand back. "Merlin, Ginny, did you eat a bucket of jalapenos or what?"

"Merlin?" asked Luke with a raised eyebrow – he was a Muggle.

Ginny wasn't paying attention. The world was swaying and the sick feeling was taking over her now. "I... my head..."

Grace wrapped an arm around Ginny's waist and helped her to stumble to the door, Alden holding onto her shoulder, Philippa holding her hand and comforting her with murmured its okays and nearly theres and other such really useless comments.

They staggered up the stairs as a unit (the dance studio was in the basement) and then out onto the street.

The ice-cold air hit Ginny's face, making her cool down immediately... far too fast.

"She's getting too cold," Grace panicked. "Er, does any have their wa-

Alden coughed as loudly as he could and kicked her in the shin, with a meaningful glance towards Luke.

Ginny's head was spinning... someone was approaching... focus on them... she's read somewhere that focusing on something distant helped... she concentrated... and the blurry figure came into perfect view.

Her stomach crushed into a tiny space, making breathing impossible, making her heart-beat stagger, stop... and for some weird reason it didn't sound like it was starting up again... not to her at least... she couldn't breathe...

Tom looked pretty much the same as when he'd just come out Azkaban. Tall, too thin, untidy hair, pale jaw dotted with black. He was staring at her. The expression of a man sentenced to hang.

An expression to match hers.

Breathe – I can't BREATHE –

“Ginny?” Grace followed her gaze. The brunette Slytherin made a low angry hiss like an enraged cat, and stepped slightly in front of Ginny, as if to defend her –

“No,” Ginny gasped. “No – I can’t – can’t-”

Her head spinning – her eyes fading – her stomach screaming in pain –

Tom’s haunting expression of devastation, and a broken whisper of “Ginevra” were the last things to imprint into her head before she collapsed.

xxx

A/N: Aww. She collapses in front of him. Nice. Well, I told you that it was going to be the worst night of her life. Oh, it was so funny at school, because you know how I mentioned that there’s a sixth-former in my school who looks exactly like Tom? I bumped into him in the corridor (the klutz that I am :D) and kept staring at him, thinking, Tom...Tom... and I think he got freaked out by it... hahahha... I’m such a retard...

Heyyy... if anyone is any good at making videos, can they help me to make a trailer for Rewind? Thank yewww.

Next Time:

Tom never knew what was inside that building. Obviously some kind of party, as several tipsy-looking teenagers came out, dragging their unwell-looking friend with them.

He stopped dead.

It was Ginevra.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty-Three: Look What Happens

Her stomach crushed into a tiny space, making breathing impossible, making her heart-beat stagger, stop... and for some weird reason it didn't sound like it was starting up again... not to her at least... she couldn't breathe...

Tom looked pretty much the same as when he'd just come out Azkaban. Tall, too thin, untidy hair, pale jaw dotted with black. He was staring at her. The expression of a man sentenced to hang. An expression to match hers.

"No," Ginny gasped. "No – I can't – can't-" Her head spinning – her eyes fading – her stomach screaming in pain – she couldn't breathe - Tom's haunting expression of devastation, and a whisper of "Ginevra" were the last things to imprint into her head before she collapsed.

xxx

I was looking for a warning sign

When the truth is

I miss you so

And I'm tired

I should never have let you go

Tom never knew what was inside that building. Obviously some kind of party, as several tipsy-looking teenagers came out, dragging their unwell-looking friend with them.

He stopped dead.

It was Ginevra.

Hartwin, Philips, Decrow, two males that he didn't know, and her. Ginevra.

He stood stock-still in the middle of the street, staring at her in shock.

What had happened to her? She was so painfully thin that she looked as though she was going to snap. Her beautiful eyes were torn, agonised. She looked so weak, like she was going to pass out at any second. She looked as though she was dying.

Then she saw him.

He saw her stomach cave in as she stopped breathing. And then his panic began to mount when she didn't start breathing again.

Hartwin noticed him, and hissed furiously, forming a barrier between him and Ginevra – no – he needed her – but Ginevra was gasping, “no” – did she need him – would she take him back – oh please, oh if a God existed, Tom begged that he was listening, please let her take him back – she was the best part of his life – she was his life – “I can't-” she continued. “I can't-”

She had breathed in yet she'd seen him-

What was wrong with her?

“Ginevra,” he whispered, and for what was only the fourth time in his whole life, he felt one lone tear stab the corner of his eye.

And then she crumpled to the ground.

Reality kicked in.

“Ginevra!” he cried, rushing forwards desperately. They were all crouched around her, Hartwin trying to get her to wake up. “Oh God, Ginevra-”

Suddenly Decrow turned towards him, sheer fury and hatred burning in her green eyes. “Get away from her,” she snarled. “Get the hell away from her.”

“No – no – Ginevra – I- I need-”

“Get away from her!” screamed Hartwin, standing up, and Tom had never realised before now that she was really, really tall, and she glared at him, nearly as tall as he was. “Haven’t you done enough?”

This was like being stabbed in the stomach.

He’d done this.

This was all his fault.

“No,” he whispered, feeling his stomach disappear. “I didn’t - I couldn’t have-”

“Well, you did, okay?” Philippa said furiously. “Get lost.”

Hartwin ducked down beside Ginny again. “She’s not breathing,” she said, panic lacing her voice. “I can barely hear her heart.”

“CPR?” one of the unfamiliar males suggested, a ginger-haired young man who looked extremely anxious.

“What?” Philippa asked, looking confused.

“It’s a procedure to get someone breathing again,” Tom cut in shakily. “You push down on their chest five times and then breathe into their mouth, holding their nose closed.”

“You don’t know what CPR is?” asked the ginger incredulously.

“They’re not from around here,” Tom muttered.

“No, no, that’s too dangerous. Her heart’s weak enough as it is. If you push down on her chest too hard it could stop altogether. Oh God.” Hartwin shoved a hand backwards through her brown hair. “She can’t stay here. I can’t do this. We have to Appa- we have to go to hospital.”

One of the males turned the other. “Can you call a cab?” he asked coolly.

“Sure.” He ran off down the stairs back towards the building that they’d come from.

“Hold on, guys, but don’t bump Ginny,” said Hartwin-

Tom needed to go with them-

He grabbed Philips’ arm-

Philips wrenched him off, pure malice flaming in his eyes-

CRACK.

They were gone.

“No,” Tom gasped. “No – Ginevra-“

She wasn’t breathing. They could barely hear her heart. She was dying. He’d killed her. He’d killed her. He loved her, and she loved him, and he’d killed her. It was all his fault.

He Apparated to St. Mungoes’ just before the ginger-haired man came back up the stairs, presuming that they had actually gone to St. Mungoes’.

Where is she?

He couldn’t remember how to breathe. Breathing was unimportant anyway. If she didn’t breathe, then he didn’t breathe. She was worth not breathing.

You threw her away and this is what comes back to bite you.

Tom caught a glimpse of flaming red hair being wheeled away down a corridor, surrounded by a group of other people. He ran after the stretcher, leaping over a bench, skidding around a group of sickly old ladies, dodging an annoyed-looking nurse, people bellowing after him, he didn’t care-

The doors closed before he could get through them.

They locked.

“No,” he gasped, rattling the door-handle. “No – no – Ginevra – no-”

“Excuse me, sir, you’re not allowed in there,” said a nurse, frowning at him.

“I have to – my – no – Ginevra – I – I have to-” He wasn’t making any sense. He knew that he wasn’t; he could hear the ramble coming out of his mouth, but even when he tried to talk normally, he couldn’t make it come out in human sentences.

“You’re going to have to wait, sir.”

“I killed her! Oh God – I love her – I love her – and I said – I said – I didn’t – I do – I said I didn’t – but I do – no - I do – and I’ve killed her – she’s dead – my – I – no-”

“Please calm down,” said the nurse. “Can I take your name?”

People were starting to stare. Starting to stare? They’d been staring for a very long time-

I’ve killed her I’ve killed her I’ve killed her

Yes, and you should have killed her long ago...

NO! I love her I love her I’ve killed her I love her

Tom was hyperventilating. “Open the door!”

“You’re not allowed in there.”

“A hundred Galleons?” he tried desperately. “Two hundred. Just open the door. Please. Please open the door. I’ll buy you a drink. I’ll buy you dinner. Open the door – please please please, I’m actually begging you-”

“As tempting as dinner, a drink and two hundred Galleons sounds,” the nurse said sarcastically, “you have to wait until visiting hours before going anywhere. And you still aren’t allowed in there.”

“Fine. Fine. I’m staying here, though. You can’t make me leave.” Tom was trying to calm down now, but it wasn’t working. At least he could talk now.

“That’s fine with us,” the nurse laughed, and went away.

Tom sat down where he was, on the floor, pulling his knees up close to his chest. Oh God. Oh God. How could he have been so stupid? How could he have been so bloody stupid? He needed her. He needed her.

She wanted to marry me.

His chest constricted painfully and he could feel breathing becoming difficult. He needed her. He loved her. He needed her. Oh God. He was such an idiot. Screw Head Boy, screw his hundred-and-sixty-five I.Q, here was the proof – he was the stupidest person on the planet. Even stupider than really stupid people like Eleanor Fionn.

He pushed himself up onto his feet and hurried towards the receptionist. “When are visiting hours?” he asked.

Wordlessly, she pointed a finger up to the sign above her head. Tom read it.

Visiting Hours

Mon – Fri: 0500-2300

Sat – Sun: 0700-2100

What day was it? Saturday. Saturday? He had to wait until seven in the morning to know if she was even alive.

What time was it now? He didn’t have his watch with him. What time was it? Maybe, by some miracle, it was six-fifty-eight in the morning.

Maybe. He looked at the clock on the wall. It wasn't six-fifty-eight. It was five minutes to midnight.

"That's not fair!" he exploded at the receptionist. "I have to wait seven hours to know if she's even still alive, or if she's – she's – she's-" He couldn't make himself say the word.

"Dead?" the receptionist supplied helpfully.

"No," he groaned, staggering backwards and holding his hands over his ears. Back he stumbled until he fell onto a bench, where he slumped over, holding his head in his hands. "No, no, no..."

Seven. His favourite number. Seven hours until seven o'clock. This wasn't fair.

Not fair not fair not fair not fair

She can't die she can't die she's all I have

She's everything

And if she dies then I've got nothing and I'll never have anything ever again

This is all so stupid because of Marvolo. It's all your fault – I hate you I hate you

You could never have made it last anyway

I could have! I could have tried. She wanted to marry me. I could have asked her again. I could have married her. I could have lived the rest of my life with her...

He groaned again: "No..." and hit himself repeatedly on the head with his fist. "Stupid, stupid, stupid," he muttered. His eyes burned. His throat was so tight that he could barely breathe.

Her friends were all there with her, defending her, protecting her – from him. He didn't blame them. He'd destroyed her. He'd killed her. If he could, he would've protected her from himself.

You did try to protect her from yourself. And that's what got you into this mess. You tried to give her a chance at a normal life. You tried to defend her from the abnormal and the life with you where everything would be over-ruled by your stupid insanity... and look what happens.

I was trying to help her. I was trying to do what she wanted. Why couldn't I just be selfish? Why couldn't I just snatch her and hold her close and never let go? Then maybe she wouldn't be dying.

You try to save her and look what happens.

xxx

Tom woke up to reality at six-thirty on Sunday morning. He hadn't been asleep – he didn't dare. He'd just stared blankly at the wall until the real world faded into the background.

The nurse was shaking his shoulder.

"Hey, you," she said.

Immediately, he looked across at the clock. "It's not seven yet," he said in horror. "She's died, hasn't she?" His voice was becoming extremely high-pitched. "She's dead. She's – oh, fu-"

"Hey!" she said sharply. "I'll thank you not to use that language in here. We have children around. And I think you'll be happy to know that she's alive. They're letting you in early, is all."

The relief that swept over him almost made him fall backwards off the bench, which didn't have a back to it. Instead, however, he stood up instantly. "Where is she?"

"Through that door on the left, up three flights of stairs, and then find Room 346-D."

Before she even finished saying it, Tom had disappeared up the stairs.

His heart was going at ten-thousand miles an hour as he ran up, three steps at a time. Up one flight of the stairs... then the next... then the next...

Tom emerged on the third floor, whipping his head from side to side as he searched for the right door.

322-A... 322-B... he scanned further. 338-C...

He hurried through a set of doors and moved swiftly down a brightly lit corridor, searching frantically for 346-D.

That is the correct number, isn't it, he panicked for a second. Then he recalled that yes, it was right.

346-A... 346-B... 346-C... his heart skipped a beat. 346-D.

Carefully, Tom pushed open the door. He caught glimpse of a drip going into a very thin arm, and a group of people crowded around a bed, and a flash of scarlet, and the most devastated eyes he'd ever seen-

"Ginevra," he whispered brokenly.

Then, in less than a second, her friends had ganged up on him, forcing him out of the room.

"Get out" – "get the hell away from here, Riddle" – "do you want us to rip you to pieces?" – "don't give me another reason to kill you where you stand" – "GET OUT" –

And, rising above them all, a shaking voice crying out, "No!"

Tom stared at her, suddenly resigned to fight. Was that a 'no' because he was here, or because they were making him leave? Their eyes met for a split-second, before tears appeared in her eyes and she ripped her gaze away, hiding her face behind her bedraggled hair.

"I'm so sorry," he choked out, his words a strangled sob. He couldn't keep himself together. The shards of his life were falling all across the floor. "Oh God, I'm so sorry."

Hartwin stared at him with the most lethal, dangerous expression that he'd seen in his whole life. She hissed, her voice low, "You should have tried saying sorry before you nearly killed her. It's too late now to apologise."

He went limp, no longer able to struggle, and they shoved him out of the Hospital room easily. He fell on his back in the hallway outside and was nearly run over by a wheelchair, but he didn't really care. He picked himself up, but he couldn't pick up the pieces.

xxx

A/N: I stole some song lines... teehee. I was listening to Apologise by OneRepublic, and it goes it's too late to apologise... it's too late... and I was thinking, that would fit nicely. And then, after I finishing typing it, it changed to Three Days Grace and went, it's not too late, it's never too late. How ironic is that? I thought that it was really funny... apparently not. I have a few review-replies this time. Not loads, but that's really annoying (no offence intended), and it takes up loads of time. Bleurgh. Please review!

Next Time:

He came back.

It was stupid, it was incredible, and it was like swallowing fire. Burning pain that made her fingers curl tighter and her eyes sting in her skull. How dare he. How bloody dare he.

xxx

XxRandomHeartxX: LOL, that would have been funny. As it is, I was waiting for my next class with my friend, and he came out a nearby classroom in the middle of my conversation, and I just kind of got distracted and went, "-and then it was so funny becaaaaauu... uh... -

blink- what was I saying?" Haha. Tempting thought actually, taking his picture. :P His hair is different from Tom's, and he smiles too much, but apart from that, it's like arghhh! He has such a pretty face. :D I LOVE Rascal Flatts (especially the song What Hurts The Most) and Wicked! I love it when Elphaba flies, it's so amazing! The Free Hugs video was amazing, I wish I could have been there when he did that. I tried that once, but no-one hugged me. :(

storm-brain: Wow. I actually love you. If you could, that would so wonderful of you! –squee- Thank you! For the clips, you could just put a DVD of Harry Potter in your computer and mess the order around... that's what most people do, I think. I don't know. I would try it myself, but I can't find my Chamber of Secrets DVD, and that's kind of the most important. XD

xxx

In the next chapter, I'm going to post up an example of my Evil!Tom fic to see what you think. I'm trying a new approach with it, and writing way more formally. The title that I've come up with so far is The Serpent and the Siren, but if you can think of a better one, that'd be great, thanks!

Chapter Thirty-Four: This Heart Beats For Only You

Carefully, Tom pushed open the door. He caught glimpse of a drip going into a very thin arm, and a group of people crowded around a bed, and a flash of scarlet, and the most devastated eyes he'd ever seen- "Ginevra," he whispered brokenly.

Then, in less than a second, her friends had ganged up on him, forcing him out of the room. "Get out" – "get the hell away from here, Riddle" – "do you want us to rip you to pieces?" – "don't give me another reason to kill you" – "GET OUT" – And, rising above them all, a shaking voice crying out, "No!"

Tom stared at her, suddenly resigned to fight. Was that a 'no' because he was here, or because they were making him leave? Their eyes met for a split-second, before tears appeared in her eyes and she ripped her gaze away, hiding her face behind her bedraggled hair. He went limp, no longer able to struggle, and they shoved him out of the Hospital room easily. He fell on his back in the hallway outside and was nearly run over by a wheelchair, but he didn't really care. He picked himself up, but he couldn't pick up the pieces.

xxx

This heart, it beats

Beats for only you

My heart is yours

Ginny opened her eyes and saw people crowded around her. Philippa... Alden... Grace... Edouard... a nurse...

Grace was the first to notice that she was awake. "Ginny!" she gasped, rushing to her side. "Ohmigod, how are you feeling?"

Her eyelids were heavy with weakness, and she couldn't make herself speak coherent sentences. "I..." Despair was crushing her smaller and smaller. She looked sideways and saw that there was a tube in her arm.

“They’re just getting your nutrition levels back up,” Grace explained. “That way, maybe when you eat something, your body will be used to it again, and you’ll be able to keep it down.”

Alden moved closer. “Are you okay? Can we get you anything?”

It was too painful to move. She couldn’t shake her head. She mouthed no, shuddering with the effort. They crowded around her, holding her hands and mumbling that she was going to be fine, that they were glad she was awake...

The nurse excused herself, saying that she needed to tell someone that Ginny was awake. The redhead barely noticed. She was still building up the strength to sit up. It was probably going to take a while, as she could barely move her head.

“We brought you chocolate,” said Philippa, “but the nurse wouldn’t let us give it to you. She says it’ll make you worse.”

Ginny slumped back, feeling miserable. She was ill, and she wasn’t even allowed chocolate.

A single memory flashed back to her repeatedly.

Tom looked pretty much the same as when he’d just come out of Azkaban. Tall, too thin, untidy hair, pale jaw dotted with black. He was staring at her. The expression of a man sentenced to hang. An expression to match hers.

Tom’s haunting expression of devastation, and a whisper of “Ginevra” were the last things to imprint into her head before she collapsed.

She flinched at the memory. It hurt too much.

The door creaked, and someone stepped in.

Ginny’s weak, barely-conscious eyes couldn’t focus. She couldn’t see properly. Someone tall. Thin. Dark hair. The eyes of someone who was dying slowly. “Ginevra...”

Agony tore through her, and then she couldn't see him anymore as all of her friends ganged up on him.

"Get out-" Grace was yelling.

"Get the hell away from here, Riddle-" Alden was snarling.

It was a vast confusion of threats and the pain was building up until she wanted to scream. She needed him. She needed him. And yet she couldn't bear to have him anywhere near her.

"-don't give me another reason to kill you-"

"No!" With a strength that she didn't know she had, she cried out. Don't kill him. Don't let him die. Let him be happy, even while I waste away. Please – but don't let him be here.

For only one second, maybe two, they looked into each other's eyes. Those familiar eyes were so agonisingly beautiful in all of their dark pain that tears spilled down her cheeks, and she used the last ounce of her strength to turn her face away. She didn't want to see him anymore.

"I'm so sorry." His words were defeated, drowning in despair, strained with the effort of staying afloat. "Oh God, I'm so sorry..."

"You should have tried saying sorry before you nearly killed her," Grace snarled. "It's too late now to apologise."

Ginny was grateful for her friends sticking up for her, but she wished they wouldn't. She didn't want any more part in this. She merely wanted to curl up under the sheets and hide, never emerging again. She stared at the wall, hearing but not taking in what was happening around her. She heard his name several times, and a lot of low, muttered profanities.

It hurt to hear.

She closed her eyes and let the tears slowly slide from between her eyelashes.

xxx

He came back.

It was stupid, it was incredible, and it was like swallowing fire. Burning pain that made her fingers curl tighter and her eyes sting in her skull. How dare he. How bloody dare he.

It was a Wednesday. Four days after Ginny had been submitted into the hospital. She was feeling stronger now. She could move easily, and speech was simple. Normal things like blinking and breathing and eating didn't hurt anymore.

It was living that caused the pain.

As she was getting better, Ginny didn't constantly have all of her friends around her at the same time. She generally had someone with her, but was usually limited to one friend at a time. This made it less pressed to make conversation, she found, and was glad for it.

A light, wary knock sounded on the door, and, with a be right back glance at the invalid in the plastic bed, Philippa crossed to the door. She pulled it open, and then suddenly stepped into the hallway, shutting the door behind her.

What's happening? Ginny frowned.

Low, rapid speech faintly came through to the redhead, though she couldn't hear what was being said. She only distinguished one word: a cracked, broken, "please".

She recognised that voice, and her still-weak frame braced, ready for the soreness that seeing him would bring.

The door opened.

Philippa stayed outside, and from the gentle patter of footsteps, apparently walked away, down the hallway, for some privacy. COME BACK, Ginny yelled silently in her head to the Ravenclaw. Don't leave me here with him.

Tom appeared in the doorway, but didn't move any closer.

"Get out."

"...I'm not even in yet," he said quietly, his humour humourless, his eyes flashing down to where the floor tiling changed pattern, indicating the change of room. He was indeed still in the hallway part.

"I don't care," she said coldly, her voice shaking slightly. She struggled to keep it calm and smooth. She couldn't break down. Not now. "Get out."

"Please." There was such a level of pain in his slightly-accented voice that it broke Ginny's barely-healing heart. For the mountain that it had once been, she had only ten grains of sand. He had held the rest of it... and she'd thought that he'd thrown it away...

Hadn't he?

"Get the hell out. I don't give a damn for whatever you have to say," Ginny said, trembling. "I have a button two inches from my hand that will alert every guard in the building, and so help me, Riddle, I will call security."

A nurse came in, slipping past Tom, her expression alarmed. "Is everything alright in here?" Her frown passed between Ginny's quivering tears and Tom. "Is this young man bothering you?"

The hazel eyes in that too-thin face flickered to the dark, pained ones just in the doorway for barely a second before she looked away. Despite her tears and shaking hands, she set her face stubbornly. "Yeah."

“I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to ask you to leave,” said the nurse firmly to Tom. “Miss Peregrine is in recuperation and we will not tolerate any disturbances to her health or manner.”

Ginny didn’t look at him, still standing there stupidly. She heard him swallow, and mumble, “Of course.” She didn’t need to look up to know that he was already gone.

xxx

Two weeks was the minimum length of a healing patient’s stay, even though Ginny already felt well enough to go back to school after one. It was an official fact that St. Mungoes’ Hospital was the most boring place in the world, Ginny decided. She had been presented with a Wizarding Radio to entertain herself with.

The radio sat in her lap as she fiddled with the dials, switching between stations and listening to the soaps or songs or interviews on it.

“But... Charles! You don’t understand what you’re saying, I’m sure. I should get you home.”

“I do understand, doll. I love y-”

Ginny slapped the dial, switching the radio forward ten stations. SLAP.

“-and thank you for calling us, Mr. Bryson. Is there anyone you’d like to shout out to?”

“Why, yes, there is. I’d like to shout out to my fiancée-”

SLAP. Another ten stations forward. Ginny’s lip curled, her eyes narrowing to slits. Stupid radio! What did it know? This had probably been set up on purpose. Stupid radio!

This heart, it beats

Beats for only you

My heart is y-

SLAP. The radio wouldn't change. It was stuck, and wouldn't skip any further forwards. Dials spun, ticking and tocking feverishly past every FM and AM, but nothing changed.

"That was When I'm Broken, the new hit by Hippogriff Stampede, one of the latest bands to climb to stardom. Next, we have a ballad for all of you lucky lovers, My Star-"

SLAP.

"-by Abracadra Swift-"

SLAP. SLAP. SLAP. SLAP.

You are my star

Always shine on me, shine on

Wish on a star

As long as you're mine

Then I'll shine on, shine o-

With a cry of anger and distress, Ginny lifted the radio with both hands, heaved it backwards over her head, and hurled it at the wall. It crashed to the wallpaper, shattered, and spluttered one final 'shine on' before falling silent.

"What's going on in here?" a medical assistant asked, sticking his head through the door, eyes wide at the noise. He came to the sight of a slumbering teenage girl, one foot right next to the precariously wobbly table. Oh dear. She must have kicked the radio off by accident. Tutting, he continued on his way.

Dominic Philips' surgery results came back, Alden informed her when he came to visit one day, unusually subdued. He would live... but in a coma.

Ginny couldn't help but imagine that life inside her own head, not having to see anyone, not having to talk to anyone, not having to do anything, was the most serene and perfect thing she could imagine. She didn't mention this, as Alden was extremely upset, and she didn't think that her macabre misery would cheer him up much. Instead she chattered to him about funny things that had never really happened, rumours that she'd never really heard. He didn't know the difference, and it made him smile.

She couldn't help but wonder if his smile was as fake as hers was.

Grace visited her also. Apparently, in his sadness, Alden had neglected to tell her what he was supposed to – that Ginny had, unfortunately, missed the NEWT mocks. However, this meant that she would have to take them in her free periods. Also, she needed to catch up to the homework they had been set.

It went without saying that Grace visiting her was a bad experience.

“Oh,” Grace had also said, before she left, “and Swithin’s scheduled the Quidditch try-outs – you know, to replace... Dom – for the Tuesday after you go back to school, especially so that you can be there. He really wants to keep you on the team. He told me to tell you that.”

“Tell him I say thanks,” Ginny had said gratefully, and had sunk back onto her pillow the instant the brunette had left.

She didn't want to try out again. She didn't want to be on the team anymore. Quidditch had put one of her friend's in a coma. Quidditch was a sport for whooshing through the air like not a problem could hold you down.

Ginny had so many problems that the broomstick would fall out of the air.

She buried her face in the pillow. She wanted to know what he had wanted to say. She wanted to know why he'd come. She wanted to see him. She wanted to hold onto him and never let him go. So,

because of these wants, she deliberately hit her head on the bedside table, for being so pathetic.

xxx

A/N: ARGH. I have so much coursework. And school only started four days ago! –grumble- Sorry, this was basically a filler chapter, not much happens... but it tells you that even though she loves him, Ginny won't take Tom back, and that she's missed the mock-NEWTs, and that Dom's going to be in a coma. That's it, basically. Well, it gets better. Soon-ish. Promise.

Next Time:

"Oh, hi, Scott," she said, trying to side-step past him. He side-stepped with her, so that he was still in her way. "Scott, move. I need to do my homework. Seriously, I'm not in the mood for this."

"You're not in the mood for anything anymore," said Scott, looking down at her with a sad note in his eyes.

"And why do you think that is?" she asked coldly, narrowing her eyes at him. She couldn't be bothered to hate anyone, and she was being nicer to him, but hell, that didn't mean that he was forgiven for what he'd done.

"Ginny, what's the bloody point in being horrible to me?" Scott said, angry now. "Yeah, okay, so maybe I screwed up in my stupid jealousy and accidentally got your precious little boyfriend busted. He got out, didn't he? But the fact that he's broken up with you isn't my fault, so stop trying to blame me!"

Precious little boyfriend-

Her temper flared like throwing a match into a sea of petroleum.

Xxx

Hey, I promised that I would post up part of The Serpent and the Siren, didn't I? Here it is! Tell me what you think!

xxx

The sky rained flames as Hogwarts fell.

Outside the castle lay the twisted dead, the mutilated earth, and numerous animal aid from the Forbidden Forest called forwards for help. Inside the castle, smoke churned thicker than air, fire danced, and the only noises were the screams of firing cursing and explosions of stone.

Already Ron was crumpled somewhere with the life seeping through his eyes. Last Ginny had seen, Hermione had been torn between tugging desperately on his sleeve in a vain attempt to bring him back and shooting teary-eyed hexes at the Death Eaters that swarmed in a circle around her like flies. Fred – gone. Percy – under the Cruciatus, when she saw him. She had no idea what was happening to her parents or Harry, but she hoped fervently that they were okay.

“Harry!” Ginny called, her throat filling with smoke, eyes watering with the sting of it. “Harry!”

He’d told her that he would look out for her – as though she needed looking out for her. However, she’d heard that cold, high voice, and knew that Tom – no. Voldemort – would only appear when he knew that Harry was weak enough to strike.

Ginny would not allow Harry to fail. Not now, after so many years of building up to this moment.

“Harry!” she shouted again, and in that second, she found him.

In all truth, she found his wand first, in pieces, rolling across the now-uneven stone. Then, looking up, she saw his silhouette against the orange of the fire all around, unarmed. A few feet away, the unmistakable shape of Voldemort’s snake-like head and billowing cloak, saying something too softly to be heard.

All alone, unseen in that corridor, Ginny knew without even an edge of doubt that Harry was going to die, and there was nothing that she could do about it. It was impossible.

Something that Percy had once said flashed back to her.

Impossibility is only judged by the result of trial and failure.

She needed to try.

“HARRY!” she yelled, her voice louder than ever, and too late she realised that she had just thrown away the element of surprise, but pointed her wand anyway at the wavering figure of the Dark Lord. “Avada-”

Hesitation clouded her ability to think clearly.

She was going to kill someone. She was going to murder someone in cold blood...

Someone who had cut her childhood short.

Someone who had come close to destroying her.

“Avada kedavra!” she yelled, jabbing her wand forwards.

As the emerald light flashed and lit up the corridor she stood in, she heard, “GINNY, NO!”

It was only in the green light of her Unforgivable Curse that she saw that Harry wasn't where she thought he'd been. It was an illusion. In reality, the figure of 'Harry' was a statue... and the image of Voldemort... was Harry.

Then he collapsed.

Ginny stared with wide brown eyes. She'd... she'd just killed the Boy Who Lived. Voldemort had tried for seventeen years to do it, and she murdered him in less than four seconds.

The thrill that it gave her was frightening.

xxx

Yup, that's how it starts. Ginny kills Harry. Mwahaha. In case it wasn't obvious, it's going to be a Dark!Ginny fic. Please review!

Chapter Thirty-Five: Happy Endings

She didn't want to try out for Quidditch again. She didn't want to be on the team anymore. Quidditch had put one of her friend's in a coma. Quidditch was a sport for whooshing through the air like not a problem could hold you down.

Ginny had so many problems that the broomstick would fall out of the air.

She buried her face in the pillow. She wanted to know what he had wanted to say. She wanted to know why he'd come. She wanted to see him. She wanted to hold onto him and never let him go. So, because of these wants, she deliberately hit her head on the bedside table, for being so pathetic.

xxx

Ginny was given a big welcome when she got back to Hogwarts. Well, not massive, but a few people had turned out to welcome her, so it was bigger than nothing. She suspected that Grace had organised this. Standing in a big crowd by the Entrance Hall stairs was Philippa, Alden, Ramira, Scott, Jack Swithin (to her immense surprise), Flora (also to her surprise), Heather Tristanebury, Celine Xavier, Antonia Durrell, Mia Brown (a Gryffindor Prefect from last year, who Ginny had never really talked to, but held nothing against), Bernard, Edouard Devin, and several people who she didn't even know.

"Hello," she said, blinking at them all. "Er. What are you doing here?"

The majority rushed forwards to hug her, while Jack Swithin and the ones that she didn't know stood awkwardly, shifting from foot to foot, before approaching warily, not really in their forte.

"Grace," said Ginny warningly, scowling at the other girl, who'd accompanied her back from St. Mungoes'. "I'll get you back for this."

Then she was drowned in hugs, and grins, and 'oh we were so worried's. Ginny was quite pleased that Scott had turned up, as he

had been avoiding her for a while after the last time that she'd snapped at him.

"Scott!" she said, beaming. "I thought that you'd forgotten about me!"

"No," he muttered, seeming to resent something that he didn't say aloud, but then he smiled. "Are you okay? Philippa told me what happened. I can't believe the nerve of-"

Ginny tuned out of the rest of what Scott had to say, turning away from him so that she wouldn't have to hear it, and embraced Antonia instead, assuring everyone that she was fine.

Because I am, she reminded herself. I'm fine.

Jack came up to her, the last person. "You're trying out for the Quidditch team, right?" he asked gruffly.

She hesitated. She'd already decided on the answer to this – a definite no. But somehow, when she was asked so outright, she wasn't sure. "I..." she bit her lip. "...Yeah, I am." She sighed.

"Good." Jack nodded, and uncomfortably added something unintelligible. She caught the phrase 'glad you're better' before he sloped off towards the dungeons.

xxx

Every free period for a week was spent taking mock exams. Ginny didn't have any time to revise for them, as she had to also catch up on not only last week's homework, but this week's as well. Grace helped as best as should in between revising for her real NEWT exams, but it wasn't enough.

Everything was 'pay attention, Miss Peregrine', 'are you listening, Miss Peregrine', 'your homework standard is slipping, Miss Peregrine', 'this really isn't good enough, Miss Peregrine' until Ginny was sick of it. She couldn't cope.

She was walking to the library to try and get some peace and quiet for her homework, but walked into someone.

“Oh, hi, Scott,” she said, trying to side-step past him. He side-stepped with her, so that he was still in her way. “Scott, move. I need to do my homework. Seriously, I’m not in the mood for this.”

“You’re not in the mood for anything anymore,” said Scott, looking down at her with a sad note in his eyes.

“And why do you think that is?” she asked coldly, narrowing her eyes at him. She couldn’t be bothered to hate anyone, and she was being nicer to him, but hell, that didn’t mean that he was forgiven for what he’d done.

“Ginny, what’s the bloody point in being horrible to me?” Scott said, angry now. “Yeah, okay, so maybe I screwed up in my stupid jealousy and accidentally got your precious little boyfriend busted. He got out, didn’t he? But the fact that he’s broken up with you isn’t my fault, so stop trying to blame me!”

Precious little boyfriend-

Her temper flared like throwing a match into a sea of petroleum. “I’m not blaming you for what he did. I’m blaming you for being an insensitive asshole!” she snapped.

“What?”

“Everything, all the time! ‘Oh, Ginny, it’s fine, he wasn’t much of a boyfriend anyway’. ‘Don’t worry, nothing lasts forever, you know. It’s normal for this to happen’. ‘How are you feeling, Ginny?’ ‘Oh, Ginny, let’s just gang up on-” she struggled here- “-on – on Tom, and go ON and ON about him, because after all, it’s only BLOODY AGONY for you’!”

“I have never said that,” Scott said horrified.

“No, you haven’t. But that’s what it’s been meaning for me! Strangely enough, having at go at him with me isn’t helping! I could get on with

my life so much easier, you know, if I could just forget him – which is pretty freakin’ hard when you’re always going on about him!” Ginny shouted.

“Okay, okay – I’m sorry, I didn’t know-”

“YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING!” Seven weeks of fury and destructive despair was exploding out of Ginny like nothing ever seen before to mankind, and, honestly, for very little reason. “EVERYTHING IS BUILDING UP, PIECE BY PIECE, AND I CAN HANDLE THAT, BUILDING A WALL ONE BRICK AT A TIME – BUT I CAN NOT FREAKIN’ HANDLE YOU CONSTANTLY STEPPING IN AND HELPFULLY DROPPING A BLOODY STONE COLUMN ON MY HEAD!”

All the little hurting things that people had said had made a trail of matches to the dynamite, and this was not only the last match falling into place, this was the fire as well.

“Not on purpose-”

“YES, ON BLOODY PURPOSE! JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK THAT MAYBE IF YOU DISS TOM ENOUGH, THEN I’LL FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU INSTEAD!” she screamed at him, tears springing to her eyes, stinging, burning in her skull as she refused to let the salt tears fall. She wouldn’t show that weakness, though frankly she wasn’t sure that a display of weakness could get more extreme than screaming her lungs out at Scott Reeve. “YOU DON’T SEE ME FOLLOWING TOM AROUND AND TRYING TO WIN HIM BACK WITH STUPID COMMENTS! BECAUSE THAT’S JUST NOT HOW IT WORKS!”

People were staring, and then scurrying away, not wanting to be involved.

Ginny was breathing hard through her nose, her now-shoulder-length hair spilling across into her face. “You can’t possibly love me, Scott, because otherwise you wouldn’t seem to get such a kick out of my pain.”

“No, Ginny-” Scott tried, but she’d already left. She continued on to the library and settled down with her Arithmancy homework, focusing on it with a ferocious concentration that dug her quill-nib too deep into the parchment and stabbed holes in it with every full-stop.

xxx

“Okay, what’s the incantation for turning yourself into an animal?” Grace quizzed Ginny, reading the answer from her Transfiguration textbook between classes, preparing the redhead for her next mock exam, which was Transfiguration.

“Er, verte bestius.”

“What’s the wand shape?”

“A sort of sharp flick.” She flicked her wand. “Like that.” She bit her lip. “Was that right?”

“Yep,” said Grace cheerfully. “Okay, let’s go back to a less recent thing. How do you-”

“What’s this?” an average-height, sturdy girl with thick dark hair approaching, twirling her wand with surprisingly agile fingers, sticking her chest out so that the world could see the badge pinned to her robes – Head Girl. Penelope Dann. “Oh, right. I see.” She turned her sharp gaze on Ginny. “You get ‘hospitalised’ so that you have to take the exams a week later... and get your little friends to tell you the answers.”

“What- no, we’re no cheating,” Grace said, surprised. “I’m helping her with her homework.”

“I know you’re still sort of new here,” said Dann to Ginny, ignoring what Grace had said, “so I’ll let you off this time without sending you to Dippet. Here at Hogwarts, we don’t like cheaters.” With a swish of her wand, the Transfiguration textbook flew into her hands, and with another swish, it caught fire. “Oopsies.” She giggled. “Butterfingers.”

She gave the two of them a long, lingering, don't-mess-with-me look before heading off in the opposite direction to screw up someone else's day.

"Butterbrain, more like!" Ginny said angrily. "How the hell did she become Head Girl? Pippa's way smarter – and way nicer! How many people d'you reckon she bribed? We should complain to someone. She's such a–"

"There's nothing we can do," said Grace. "She is actually really clever, but she's horrible to everyone who's not in her..." she used her fingers for inverted commas, "special people friendship group", she quoted with an scary mimic of Dann's voice, so perfectly accurate that Ginny jumped as though the Head Girl was behind her. Grace sighed. "I am going to have to get a new textbook, though," she mused, irritated.

Ginny glared after Penelope Dann, but then Professor Slughorn called them into Potions, and her mind strayed from those thoughts to instead concentrate on her studies. She needed it. It was better to only think of her schoolwork, because when her brain wandered it could sometimes wander, unbidden, to certain topics that she preferred to keep locked away.

xxx

Ginny twitched in her sleep.

"If I can't have her, no-one can..." A scream rang out.

She rolled over, groaning and burying her face in the pillow, squeezing her eyes tightly shut.

Scarlet eyes, burning with their familiarity, yet somehow transforming into something she didn't know at all.

She twitched back onto her other side.

Dancing rabbits...

Her eyes snapped open wide, breathing hard. What the hell had that been about? The first two were creepy, but the dancing rabbits were just weird.

Ginny looked over at the clock on her bedside table. Six-thirty. She was only awake half an hour early. She sat up, pushing a hand backwards through her hair so that it spilled around her shoulders. She was really hot as the summer term had started and the days were heating up. Even in the cool dungeons, it became stifling sometimes.

She glanced down and saw that she was still sleeping beneath her winter quilt, which probably explained why she was so stuffy. Grace, Flora, Avani, Claude and Ramira didn't seem to have any of these problems, because they had kicked off their winter quilts weeks ago.

Grabbing the quilt, Ginny moved to her trunk and unlocked it as quietly as she could, before bundling the patchwork blanket up as small as she could and stuffing it in the box marked G.A.P for her adopted initials. Before she battled the lid closed, she grabbed her towel and school uniform.

In the shower, she drowned her thoughts with soap, letting it get in her eyes so that she pretend that that was why there were tears mingled with the hot water spraying from the showerhead.

Sadness was actually exhausting, and she was too tired to keep being so upset. She thought about her dream again.

However, the real thing that panicked her was that usually her dreams were soft and blurry. The ones that were this crystal-clear and vivid were unusual and rare...

And while the dancing rabbits made this next memory slightly more than dubious, Ginny recalled that the vivid ones also had an uncanny knack of becoming reality.

xxx

Ginny finished her final mock on Thursday the twelfth of March. It was an Astronomy exam, and she was fairly certain that she did quite well. The next day, tired from having stayed up late in the night measuring stars for Professor Rowney, she nearly fell asleep in her breakfast. She didn't get much sleep these days, what with so many things to worry about, and also NEWT revision, and the Astronomy exam was the icing on the cake.

"Hey!" called Ginny, noticing Heather as she walked out of the Great Hall, wiping baked beans off her face. "Heather."

The eleven-year-old turned, a pouty scowl on her young, round face. "What, so do you like me now?" she asked.

That made guilt slice through the redhead. "I'm really sorry," she said quietly. "I wasn't... I wasn't..." She didn't have a word for what she hadn't been when she had dismissed Heather carelessly. She had been herself – a terrible version of herself that lost herself to her emotions.

Heather didn't look happy, but muttered, "Fine. You're forgiven." She looked up at the older girl. "Yes, what do you want?"

"Well, I just thought... if you weren't busy, then this is the only free period I have for a while," Ginny explained, "and I thought maybe I could take you to see Myrtle now."

Heather's face lit up. She didn't hold grudges, did she? "Really?" she gasped.

Ginny nodded, smiling.

"Yay!" Heather exclaimed, and tugged on Ginny's sleeve to take her there. "Oh, please, thank you, please!" she babbled.

They made their way up to the second floor where Moaning Myrtle's abandoned bathroom was, Heather clinging to Ginny, who could feel the Hufflepuff's tension and anxiety mounting rapidly.

“You ready?” Ginny asked Heather as they paused in front of the door.

Heather bit her lip, and then nodded hesitantly.

With a backwards glance to check that no-one was watching, Ginny pushed the creaky wooden door open. A cold, damp breeze hit them both, which Ginny was easily used to, due to the fact that she’d been here countless times, but Heather shivered and took a step backwards.

“Come on,” Ginny encouraged her quietly, and lead her quickly through the door before someone spotted them. “Hey – hey, Myrtle?” she called.

“Oh, great, it’s you again,” complained a low, irritated voice from a toilet cubicle down at the other end of the bathroom.

Ginny smiled wryly, her eyes flicking over to Heather, who was trembling. She’d let go of Ginny’s arm now, and was clasping her hands tightly together.

“Myrtle, I’ve brought someone to see you,” Ginny said in a bright, sing-song voice. “Aren’t you even just a little bit interested?”

A reluctant, fine-if-it’ll-make-you-go-away sigh sounded, and then the fifteen-year-old ghost floated up to the top of the cubicle, resting her elbows on it and holding her chubby chin in her palms. “What?”

Grinning, Ginny stepped sideways so that Heather was in clear view.

For a couple of seconds, there was silence. Then Myrtle’s eyes widened. “Heathie?”

Heather flinched, and then warily looked up at her deceased sister through her round glasses. “Hi, Myrt,” she stammered, swallowing hard.

Tears were forming in Myrtle’s transparent eyes. “You came to visit me?” she whispered, straightening her arms so that she lifted herself

above the cubicle, and then dropped slowly and gracelessly to just above the bathroom floor.

“Myrt,” stuttered Heather. “Myrt – you’re see-through!”

Ginny chuckled, staying quietly by the door. Myrtle laughed as well, and the noise was so rough and raw that Ginny suspected she hadn’t laughed in several years. It was so sweet that it made her stomach hurt. Why did other people always get the happy endings?

“I can fly as well,” Myrtle bragged, and, to show off, flitted into the air, hovering above the sinks, a pale shimmering beam of dusty light gleaming through her from the window at the end of the room. “See?”

“Cool,” said Heather, and while it was clear that she did think highly of this new ability of her sister, it was also apparent that she would have preferred to have her alive. “...Are you going to be fifteen forever?”

Myrtle’s face fell. “Yes.”

“In four years time, I’ll be your twin,” Heather beamed.

“And in five years time, you’ll be my big sister,” Myrtle mumbled. She attempted a smile. “And then I’ll be telling you off all the time.” She sighed. “You’re still so precocious, aren’t you?”

“Sadly, I am.” Heather smiled in return, but hers, unlike Myrtle’s, was real. “I’m probably going to be precocious forever.”

“Eleven going on eighty-five,” Ginny joked, speaking up for the first time since the two Tristaneburys had seen each other.

Startled, Myrtle looked up at the redhead, remembering that she was there. “Peregrine,” she said, and then, pausing hesitantly, amended that to, “Ginny.” She floated closer to her. “Thank you.”

Ginny nodded, sticking her hands in the pockets of her bomber jacket. “No problem.” She twitched her head towards Heather. “I like her. It was the least I could do.”

"Thank you," Myrtle repeated, and then turned back to her sister. "You'll come back, right?" Her voice was worried, anxious that this was it, that this was some sort of grand goodbye and then it would be over.

"Of course!" Heather seemed horrified that Myrtle could possibly think otherwise. "But I think I have to go to class, and I know that Ginny certainly does, so I'll talk to you later, okay?" She faltered, biting her lip. "...Can I hug you? Or will you be all weird?"

"I don't know." Myrtle stared down at herself. "I never really hugged any dead people while I was alive."

Bravely, Heather took a deep breath, filling her lungs, and then put her arms gently around the transparent, wispy form of the ex-Hufflepuff who had previously only been worth sobbing in the U-bend. She stiffened noticeably, sucking her breath in through her teeth.

"You okay?" Myrtle verified nervously, hearing this.

"Yeah," Heather grunted, her teeth clicking together once or twice as she struggled not to shiver. Her way of speaking was usually quite reserved, but now she let it slip. "S'not that bad." However, she let go, and her teeth chattered slightly. "Perhaps that wasn't such a good idea."

"Oh well," Ginny shrugged. "It's the thought that counts."

"Yes, I suppose," said Myrtle. "Alright. Bye then, Heathie. See you soon."

"See you!" chirped Heather, regaining colour as she warmed up, and then with one last longing glance, one last fleeting smile, she skipped after Ginny out of the bathroom door.

A happy feeling was swelling Ginny's heart as she walked with Heather to her Charms class, but as soon as the eleven-year-old was out of sight, it sank.

What she would give for such an easy happy ending.

xxx

A/N: You'll like the next chapter. Me promise. –squeedance- I get so hyper when I know what's going to happen and someone else didn't. I read Breaking Dawn before my friend did, and I was pissing her off so much by dancing and squealing while she tried to read it that she told me just to tell her what happens so that I could get it out of my system. That's me! Plot-spoiler!

But that's beside the point. Er. What was the point? I dunno. I don't remember anymore. I'm doing textiles technology for GCSE, and it's all about clothes and stuff. It's cool. I have to make a mood board with loads of things on it like the fabrics I like and the type of clothes I like. I LOVE IT! Mwahahaha. Sugar high... bounce.

Bounce.

Bounce.

PLEASE REVIEW!! I adore you.

Bounce.

Next Time:

They didn't have unlimited time, so the three finished their drinks quickly and then progressed towards the bookshop to get Grace's book.

Only when Ginny saw the broad sign declaring 'Flourish & Blott's' did she actually realise where they were going.

She stopped in her tracks.

xxx

BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE.

Ooooh, I want you to read it now! NOW NOW NOW.
Aarhafkdsag,adngbngfkgnas.

I'm such a child.

I saw the Tom-like guy today. And I wasn't paying attention, so out of the corner of my eye, I thought he was wearing Slytherin robes. I was just like, WHOA, double-take – my reality lines have seriously gone whack. But then I realised how stupid I was being. Hehe.

BOUNCE.

BOUNCE.

Chapter Thirty-Six: Another Glimpse Of Fire

However, the real thing that panicked her was that usually her dreams were soft and blurry. The ones that were this crystal-clear and vivid were unusual and rare... Ginny recalled that the vivid ones also had an uncanny knack of becoming reality.

A happy feeling was swelling Ginny's heart as she walked with Heather to her Charms class, but as soon as the eleven-year-old was out of sight, it sank. What she would give for such an easy happy ending.

Xxx

Let me in from the rain

Don't you let me go again

Let the water run down my face

That weekend was a Hogsmeade outing, and Grace decided that she was going to get her new Transfiguration book then. However, there weren't any bookcases, so once all of the other students had headed off in their Threstral-drawn carriages, Ginny, Grace and Philippa slipped out towards the edge of the Hogwarts grounds to Apparate.

"I'm so glad we can Apparate," said Ginny. "Otherwise this whole year would have been trapped inside the castle."

"I know," Philippa agreed. "We have so much freedom now."

Grace grinned. "We only have so much freedom because we're breaking the rules, you know," she pointed out.

"Oh yeah..."

They all laughed. Alden wasn't coming with them, as he had to work with Penelope Dann on the plans for the Graduation Ball. Ginny knew very little about it, as last year she hadn't been old enough to go,

obviously, but this year knew even less. She suspected that she'd remain oblivious until she got there.

"Ready?"

"Yep."

They linked arms, holding onto each other and maintaining body contact, then – crack – they Disappeared.

Appearing on the Diagon Alley side of The Leaky Cauldron, they headed in to get three Butterbeers, and also for Grace to clean herself up, as she'd fallen over upon arriving and grazed her palms on the pavement.

"Are you alright, Grace?" Philippa asked, snickering as the brunette siphoned the blood from her hands and then healed it with a flick of her wand.

"Yeah, I'm fine." She flexed her fingers, wincing as it stretched the new skin, and then drank her Butterbeer.

They didn't have unlimited time, so the three finished their drinks quickly and then progressed towards the bookshop to get Grace's book.

Only when Ginny saw the broad sign declaring 'Flourish & Blott's' did she actually realise where they were going.

She stopped in her tracks.

"What?" Grace asked, turning to her curiously.

"Um." Ginny scratched the back of her neck, staring down at the cobbled street. "Our education's almost over, you know. Do you have to get a new Transfiguration textbook?"

Grace gave her an appraising frown. "Yeah, I need it – why?" Her eyes widened slightly in understanding. "Ohhh."

“Never mind. I’ll just wait out here.”

“No, come in with us. It’ll be fine. If you can’t do this, then you can never get on with anything,” Philippa said firmly. “Trust me. The instant that Grace’s got the book, you can walk on out and never come back. You don’t have to even look at him. I can stand in front of you, if you want.”

Actually, I would WAY prefer just to not go in.

“Thanks,” Ginny muttered, and reluctantly followed the other girls into the bookshop. She didn’t lift her eyes from her feet. They were quite interesting, really... so was the floor... and anything that wasn’t above shoe-height. Her heart was hammering in her throat, and she was finding that breathing had become difficult.

Together Grace, Philippa and Ginny moved towards the appropriate bookcase, the redhead wedged between them so that she was shielded from view as much as possible. Ginny shifted awkwardly from her left foot to her right, back to her left again, waiting for Grace to find it. The sooner they left, the better.

She could feel someone watching her from across the room.

It was like being on fire.

Luckily, Grace found the textbook quite quickly, so they didn’t have to linger long in there.

Unluckily, the person standing quietly behind the till was the last person that she wanted anything to do with.

Her face drained of colour, hidden as her head stayed bowed low. She wished that she could hide behind her hair, but it was tied back in a ponytail.

“Ten Sickles.”

His voice made her jump. She curled her hands into tight fists.

There was a soft clinking noise as coins were passed over the counter, and as soon as Ginny was certain that Grace had handed the money over, she turned away and moved as quickly as she could towards the door. Grace and Philippa could find her later.

“Ginevra-”

No, no, no!

This isn’t fair!

She slipped through the door. The second that she had escaped the shop, she walked faster, almost jogging, away, down the street. She had no idea where she was going – all she knew was that she was going somewhere away from Flourish and Blott’s, and she was getting there fast.

Footsteps sounded behind her.

She ran.

Blood pounding through her skull, Ginny spun down a random side-alley between two buildings, breaking into a hard sprint as soon as she was out of the crowds-

A cold hand grabbed the crook of her elbow and spun her backwards.

“Let go,” she cried, trying to wrench her arm away.

“I need to talk to you,” Tom said pleadingly, only holding on tighter. Fearfully, she looked up through her fringe to meet his eyes. They were so full of pain that it was like watching someone burn alive. There was a bright red patch on one cheek.

“What happened to your face?” she asked, curious despite herself.

“Hartwin tried to stop me from coming after you.”

“Good for her.”

“She hit me.”

“Remind me to thank her for that one,” Ginny said coldly, folding her arms across her chest, and shifting uncomfortably next to him. “Say what you need to say and then get lost.” She tried to put the right amount of detached coldness into her words, but her voice was broken and this spoiled the effect she had been going for.

“Ginevra, I’m so sorry-”

“You’ve already said sorry, Riddle,” she snapped. “You don’t need to repeat yourself. I’ve never been one for radio play-backs. Can I go now?”

“No, but that was... wrong. I didn’t mean it. I... I-” he was stammering, panic and nervousness echoing through his face, emotions unmasked. “Ginevra, I- you know how I hate apologising, so this is really hard-”

“Oh, I’m so sorry for the inconvenience this conversation is causing you.”

Tom took a deep breath. “I was trying to protect you,” he said, forcing the words out. Every inhalation he took was laboured – he wasn’t an athletic person, and running after her the length of Diagon Alley clearly hadn’t done him any good. “I- I was trying to give you a chance at living like a normal person. A normal girl – well, as normal as you can be, what with you standing out so much – with a normal life, and normal friends, and a normal job, perhaps, and – and-” he swallowed- “-and maybe even a normal boyfriend.”

She stared up at him, the internal struggle to fight tears down slowly being lost.

I didn’t want to be protected.

“I mean, Christ, Ginevra, you had to bail me out of prison!” he muttered. “That can’t be... can’t be the standard of a good, ordinary relationship... and I just thought... maybe, if you were happy, then it didn’t matter how much it hurt me... because I want you to be happy,

even that excludes me from the picture..." His face was crumpling. "...I didn't know that you wouldn't be. I didn't know that - that I would nearly kill you..."

He raked a hand backwards through his hair, not seeming to care that it made tufts stick up and therefore ruined his appearance of careful and tidy and dignified.

"Let me somehow – in some pathetic, stupid way – try and explain to you how much I need you." Tom's desperate eyes stared down into hers. "Do you know fireworks? Have you stared directly at where one explodes? Do you know the feeling of having that bright, beautiful explosion in front of your eyes, making everything... everything – so much better and brilliant? And then the fireworks fade away, and it was so bright that you're blind. Everything's dark, and all you want, more than anything, is for another glimpse of fire."

Her heart was breaking. She couldn't do this. This wasn't fair. She couldn't just pick up the pieces, waiting for him to fling his hands out and knock them flying again. It just wasn't fair.

"You've seen the fire," she told him, her voice trembling as she stubbornly tried to resist how badly she wanted to run back into his arms, "and you reduced it to ashes." Crap. The tears were starting up. "If you wanted to keep the fireworks, then you shouldn't have walked over the fuse, should you?"

Tom's expression was lost and hopeless. "Please – I can't – don't-" his voice was cracking. "I love y-"

"Stop it!" Ginny stamped her foot. "This isn't fair on me. I can't keep doing this. You say you love me. You say that you didn't mean it when you said that you loved me. You say that you didn't mean it when you said that you didn't mean it when you said you loved me. I can't keep up with you anymore! What you keep saying makes a pattern, don't you see? And I don't want to have to be there the next time you change your mind."

"I never changed my mind."

Sighing sharply with pain, Tom closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. Then he swept his fingers sideways to his eyes, and when he opened them, he was looking at something on his quivering fingertips. He tipped his hand sideways, and Ginny watched a single bead of salt-water dropped to the ground.

Impossible.

“...I love you,” Tom whispered. “There is nothing in the world in size that can amount to how much I love you. I know, I never said it enough when I had the chance, but I should have, and I’ll say it every waking moment of every day for the rest of my life – I love you. ...Ginevra, I-I love you.”

His last words weren’t even audible, but she saw his lips move, and knew what he was saying.

I love you so much it hurts. Is that the answer you want? There you go. But I don’t care, because it’s not fair, and it was never fair, and – and I’m not going to be the pathetic one who comes crawling back for you.

She set her jaw tightly.

“Prove it.”

Tom’s expression slipped from desperation slowly to an incredulous frown. “What? I – I – I don’t...” He swallowed, and turned his eyes away from her, to the wall, before they flashed back to her. “...how?”

For the first time, a smile turned her lips, but her eyes were flat and stared evenly back at him. All tears had gone now, replaced by a hard determination that said in her icy mocking voice, nothing is for free these days.

“Surprise me.”

xxx

A/N: YAY! I LOVE THAT PART! See? I bet you didn't expect that, didcha? I really wanted to steal Edward's line from New Moon "it was the very blackest form of blasphemy when I said that I didn't love you" but I didn't think that I'd be able to get away with it, as this is already similar enough to New Moon. Mergh. Also, she used my comet-star-endless-night comment, so I had to use fireworks instead. Pfft.

I have some review replies below, not too many though, because that takes ages. OH! And I had to walk right past the Tom dude and I looked at him, and oh God he has beautiful eyes. Seriously. His eyes are so pretty. Ahhhh...

Next Time:

They didn't have unlimited time, so the three finished their drinks quickly and then progressed towards the bookshop to get Grace's book.

Only when Ginny saw the broad sign declaring 'Flourish & Blott's' did she actually realise where they were going.

She stopped in her tracks.

xxx

Cristelle Lillian Black: Er, you can post it in a PM from my profile page, I suppose. Yay, thank you! I thought that no-one was going to enter! No, I do not live in Nottinghamshire, but if there's a Tom-like guy there, then I am so going to investigate! XD That not-being-able-to-finish-stories isn't a bad thing. That's what I'm like! I honestly have a massive build-up of unfinished stories. I just get an idea, write it up, and then realise that it's going nowhere and ditch it. What I recommend is having a separate document (or piece of paper, depending on where you're writing it out) and just basically writing the whole plot out, chapter by chapter. Annoying, but it works. I'll see your chapter soon!

Saene: Ooh, me too! My friend dared me not to say anything, and not to move while I read a book. I lost the dare, needless to say. I just get so happy, and I rock backwards and forwards, and I bite my

fingernails, and I squeal incessantly, and when it's a bad bit, I randomly start shrieking, "No no no no!" Ha. I'm stupid. I had a huge fluff overload reading Just Listen by Sarah Dessen, and I could barely breathe from squealing so much. :D

Morning-Sunset: Oh, textiles is really good. Right now I'm doing a mood board, which is like inspiration for a later project, and basically we have to cover a piece of paper with whatever we want – fabrics, pictures, styles. It's really fun. Mine's covered in rainbows, teehee. Yeah, same, I was a huge EdwardxBella fan for the first three books, but after Breaking Dawn the whole, "you look beautiful, but then again, you always do" thing got really old, and I way prefer JasperxAlice now. Jasper is so pretty. Ooh, a GinnyxTom community? Thank you so much!!

Please review!

If you want to ask a question, I would love to answer it, as it's not like I have a real life anyway.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty-Seven: These Loyalties

“...I love you,” Tom whispered. “There is nothing in the world in size that can amount to how much I love you. I know, I never said it enough when I had the chance, but I should have, and I’ll say it every waking moment of every day for the rest of my life – I love you. ...Ginevra, I-I love you.” His last words weren’t even audible, but she saw his lips move, and knew what he was saying.

I love you so much it hurts. Is that the answer you want? There you go. But I don’t care, because it’s not fair, and it was never fair, and – and I’m not going to be the pathetic one who comes crawling back for you. She set her jaw tightly “Prove it.”

Tom’s expression slipped from desperation slowly to an incredulous frown. “What? I – I – I don’t...” He swallowed, and turned his eyes away from her, to the wall, before they flashed back to her. “...how?”

For the first time, a smile turned her lips, but her eyes were flat and stared evenly back at him. All tears had gone now, replaced by a hard determination that said in her icy mocking voice, nothing is for free these days. “Surprise me.”

xxx

Those three words

Are said too much

They’re not enough

“Did he catch up to you?” Grace asked urgently when Ginny met back up with her and Philippa. “I’m so sorry, I tried to stop him, I really did. I whacked him around the face, but it didn’t even slow him down. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, he caught up,” said Ginny, getting an ice-cream and then walking down to The Leaky Cauldron with them, towards where they had Apparated.

“What did he say?”

Ginny smirked. “He grovelled.”

Grace laughed, but Philippa frowned. Grace continued, “so then what’d you say to him?”

“I told him to get lost.” A trickle of melting ice-cream ran down the side of the cone and down her hand. She licked it off, ignoring the disgusted look that passers-by gave her.

“Oh, Ginny, that’s horrible,” said Philippa. “You know he’s not a very warm, friendly person – grovelling must have been awful for him. Aw, that was mean.”

“And?” Grace pretended that Philippa hadn’t spoken.

“He grovelled a bit more. And told me he loved me.” Ginny felt only an iota of guilt at revealing all of their private conversation, but hey – she didn’t really care. He’d humiliated her in front of the whole world; she could humiliate him in front of two people, surely?

“And?”

Ginny didn’t answer this question, and focused on eating her strawberry ice-cream with an unusual concentration. She didn’t meet neither Philippa’s nor Grace’s curious eyes.

“And?” Grace pressed.

With a sigh, Ginny reluctantly informed them, “I told him to prove it.”

Philippa squealed. “That’s so cute!” she clapped her hands together. “Now he has to prove his love to you! It’s so lovely and romantic. I was worried that you’d just brushed him off, because that would have been so tragic for both of you.”

On the contrary, Grace’s reaction was less delighted than Philippa’s. “Oh, you stupid girl,” she complained. “Now he’s going to do all these stupid cheesy things and expect you to take him back.”

A frown twisted Ginny's brow. "Expect me to take him back?"

"Well, you're not going to, are you?" Grace's eyes narrowed. "Are you?"

The redhead became again very absorbed in her ice-cream, hiding behind a sheet of untidy red hair that had fallen from being tucked behind her ear and was thus sheltering her from Grace's piercing blue gaze. Unfortunately, her ice-cream was nearly finished, so she couldn't avoid talking much longer.

They linked arms as Ginny finished her ice-cream, and she lifted her head just before they Disappeared, in time for Grace to catch her eye with a disapproving look and mutter, "You're an idiot."

xxx

Now that the preparation mock-exams for the NEWTs were over, Ginny had to focus on the real examinations. This was not made easier by the immense pressure placed on her about Tom from almost everyone.

Thankfully, Alden had no say in the matter. "I refuse to take sides," he said pointedly when Grace asked him about it. It was mainly because of this that Ginny spent a lot more time with him than anyone else – and also because he was clever and could help her with her homework.

Philippa was very strongly pro-Tom. She thought that everything he did was sweet and lovely and so romantic at the current time, until Ginny was almost tempted to find him, brutally murder him, and say triumphantly to her, 'hah! Not so cute now, is he?'

Grace made her opinion extremely clear by glowering every time his name was mentioned and occasionally referring to the times when Ginny had been totally crushed because of him. Ginny ignored this.

Heather was also on Tom's side, though not as adamantly as Philippa. She was more subtle about it. Neither Bernard nor Scott had given their opinions, but it was obvious where their loyalties lay.

These loyalties would become even clearer.

"Ginny."

She cast an appraising look behind her, seeing Bernard, and stopped moving. "I'll meet you later," she told Alden and Philippa, who she was heading to Potions with, as she judged from the sixth-year's expression that the conversation he wanted to have with her was not one that would do kindly to being overheard. "What's up?"

"Hang on," he said, holding a hand up to silence her, and stared at her, not moving, not doing... not doing anything, really.

Oookayyy...

"Shut up for a second," Bernard snapped at her.

"I didn't say anything." She frowned, bewildered. "Bernard, what's going on?"

What the hell is he doing?

"I mean, shut your thoughts up," Bernard told her sharply. "Now be quiet; I'm tryin' to find something."

"Hey!" Ginny protested, putting her hands into front of her face, as though that could protect her mind from him.

"Quiet," he growled, his eyes still blankly locked on her face. Annoyed, she fell silent and let her hands fall from her face, waiting for him to find whatever he was looking for. A minute or two passed, and students walking by gave them suspicious looks, including a very jealous-looking Eileen Prince, who Ginny knew from Harry was Snape's mum, and who she also knew was a fifth-year, and in Slytherin, though they had never met-

Oh no! She panicked. Bernard can hear that!

“Ginny,” he said irritably, “shut up. I don’t really care; I already know.”

“You know?” she squeaked.

“I know everythin’ about everyone.”

“I don’t want you to know!”

“That’s too bad, ain’t it? I don’t honestly give a damn right now about where – or when – you came from, because I’m a bit preoccupied by somethin’ a bit more important, so shut up, because there’s something’ quite urgent in your brain that I need to check.”

She became quiet again, though she was still quite bored and didn’t really see the point of-

“Ginny.”

“Sorry.”

Finally, it seemed as though he’d found what he was looking for, and there was an unusual expression on his abnormally beautiful face. It was sort of like pain... only prettier.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Ginny asked nonchalantly, as though the fact that someone had just been burrowing through every feeling and thought that she had or had ever had was something that happened all the time.

“Yes.” His velvet voice was strained.

“Is that a bad thing?”

“Yes.”

Ginny was trying not to get worried, but was worrying anyway. “Why – what’s happening? What’s wrong? Is there something screwed up in my head?” she said, her voice becoming high-pitched.

“No – well. Actually, sort of.” Bernard smirked, seeming his normal teasing self again, despite the fact that there was a great worry in his green eyes carefully misted over by a pretence that everything was okay. “Correct me if I’m wrong – which I’m not, but it’s just politeness to say that – but don’ you sometimes have strange visions?” He lifted one eyebrow. “Strange visions that come true?”

“Yeah...” she said slowly. “Only once though.”

He didn’t speak; just looked at her.

“Twice.”

Bernard swept his brown fringe out of his eyes and looked gravely down at her. “Havin’ it happen more than once classifies you as an abnormality in the eyes of the Ministry o’ Magic,” he said.

“Wait!” she said. “Hold up. What about Professor Selene? She teaches Divination, for heaven’s sake.”

He rolled his eyes. “Divination is a thousand year Hogwarts tradition – it’s been a fraudulent subject since the first teacher, who honestly was a Seer, left the school.”

“So... I have more of a chance of seeing into the future than Professor Selene?” Ginny echoed.

“Definitely.” Bernard shrugged, fixing his green eyes firmly on Ginny’s hazel ones. “Or, at least, that’s what the undercover Ministry Aurors who are probably going to try and kill ya are sayin’.”

Ginny stared. “Very funny.”

“It wasn’ intended to be.”

“You’re insane.”

“Insane, but not a liar.”

“How do they know about me, then?” Ginny probed, not believing a word that the younger Slytherin was spouting.

“I don’ have the slightest clue. However, if they know about you, then it’s unlikely that they don’ know about the less than innocent abnormalities of your boyfriend,” Bernard said coolly.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Ginny growled from between gritted teeth.

“Ya say that now.” Bernard folded his arms. “I am serious, Ginny.”

“Fine. Let’s say I believe you – which,” she added, “I don’t. What do I do about it?”

“You get rid of it.”

“It?”

“The ability.”

“What if I can’t do that?”

“Learn Leglimency. Keep it the closest, most personal secret in your heart. Do not tell a soul.”

xxx

A/N: Yeah, it’s weird... urgh. I have choir now... I can not be bothered to go... but I have to... or they’ll kick me out... merf. Here’s a proper preview... please review.

Next Time:

When she got down there, two unusual things made her stop and stare.

The first was that it was empty, as opposed to having Flora sobbing her heart out in there – she sat at Gulistan’s table on Mondays, and normally came back with one form of heartbreak or another. The

second was that sitting on her pillow was a piece of folded parchment that she was certain hadn't been there when she left the room.

Suspicious and wary, Ginny kicked off her shoes, shrugged off her jacket, and took the parchment into her hands. On the front, in a familiar neat script, were the words: To the one I love.

Ginny raised her eyebrows.

This should be good.

xxx

sb: Ja, ich wohne en... England. I don't know how to say England in German, but yes, I do.

Saene: His eyes are the prettiest colour of brown I have ever seen. :D

Please review!

If you want to ask a question, I would love to answer it, as it's not like I have a real life anyway.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty-Eight: Shine Bright

“So... I have more of a chance of seeing into the future than Professor Selene?” Ginny echoed.

“Definitely.” Bernard shrugged, fixing his green eyes firmly on Ginny’s hazel ones. “Or, at least, that’s what the undercover Ministry Aurors who are probably going to try and kill you are saying. Learn Leglimency. Keep it the closest, most personal secret in your heart. Do not tell a soul.”

xxx

Oh, star

Shine down on me

On a Monday night, as a very tired Ginny stumbled down to the Slytherin common room, she couldn’t help but wish that at Hogwarts, the NEWTs were actual newts, and all that the students had to do for the exams was send them back to freedom in a pond somewhere.

It was a weird thought, and it led her to suspecting that she might have had too much chocolate cake at dinner.

She was alone. Grace had a detention – in a panic attack, she had burst into song when she retook her Potions mock, which she’d failed. Alden was in his Head dormitory, and Philippa had already headed up to the Ravenclaw common room.

Ginny hated being alone, because it allowed her to think of the many things swirling through her head, which she usually squashed out the way by talking to other people.

Most of the Slytherins were in the common room, but she didn’t feel like talking to the few of them that she was friendly with, and continued instead to the dormitory.

When she got down there, two unusual things made her stop and stare.

The first was that it was empty, as opposed to having Flora sobbing her heart out in there – she sat at Gulistan’s table on Mondays, and normally came back with one form of heartbreak or another.

The second was that sitting on her pillow was a piece of folded parchment that she was certain hadn’t been there when she left the room.

Suspicious and wary, Ginny kicked off her shoes, shrugged off her jacket, and took the parchment into her hands. On the front, in a familiar neat script, were the words: To the one I love.

Ginny raised her eyebrows.

This should be good.

However, there was no corny love-letter inside. On the paper, far too big for the tiny message it contained, it said, Eleven o’clock under the fig tree.

Wondering what on earth was under the fig tree and why it had to be seen at eleven, Ginny glanced across at the clock. It was only just past nine. Perhaps he was going to meet her there. That would be interesting.

She took out one of the many books that she’d been given for various Christmases and birthdays but had never read, and settled down to wait for eleven o’clock.

Approximately three hours and seven chapters later, Ginny stood, excusing herself from Grace, who had returned a while ago, saying that she’d left something in the Great Hall, grabbed her jacket, and slipped out of the common room.

The sky was a dark, seamless blue, unbroken by clouds, but dotted with the smallest stars that glowed like beacons. As soon as she stepped out onto the cold grass, she wished that she’d thought to bring shoes. She crushed ripe fallen figs underfoot, cringing as the soft insides squelched over the bottom of her toes.

Peering into the gloom as she got closer, Ginny could see nothing. Her fingers were resting on the butt of her wand to pull it out to light her way when she saw the dim outline of a telescope. Tom was nowhere in sight, but that didn't mean that he wasn't there.

"Tom?" she whispered, stopping beside the telescope. "Tom?" She looked around, but couldn't see him anywhere.

She hated how she felt disappointed.

Her disappointment grew as she eyed the telescope. She had so hoped for what Grace had described – stupid corny things to try and win her back. Buying her a flashy telescope because she liked Astronomy was a bit of a let-down.

It doesn't look that flashy... in fact, she mused as she ran her fingers over the black metal, it looks about a thousand years old.

She then noticed a roll of parchment fastened to one of the focusing handles with dark green ribbon.

Upon opening it, she found not one but two sheets of paper. Now she lit her wand to see what they were. The first was a letter.

Ginevra,

I distinctly remembered something about 'moon geeks'. The telescope is already set up in the right place. The constellation that you want is in focus already, and the appropriate star is the second highest on the left.

I love you.

Tom

The second sheet of parchment was printed, with lots of application boxes, and more formal-looking. Bored easily by forms and signatures, Ginny scanned her eyes over it, getting the general idea.

National Star Registry

Name: Ginevra

Location: A129

Registered in the name of: Tom Riddle

Her breath caught.

Holy crap. He hadn't bought her a telescope.

He'd bought her a star.

Ginny peered through the eyepiece, not daring even to touch the telescope in case she jolted it out of focus in her clumsiness and then couldn't find the right star. The constellation was blurry – clearly quite a few light-years away – and only a few were clearly visible, twinkling almost fiercely in the magnification of the telescope lens.

The second highest on the left was shining the brightest of them all.

Quickly memorising the star's place as best as she could so that she could write up a constellation-map when she got back into the castle and could find A129 Ginevra later, Ginny tucked the parchment into her pocket. She eyed the telescope. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to take it.

I could always just grab it and run.

Deciding against it, she instead put an enchantment on it so that no-one would see it or walk into it, and then hurried back up to the dormitory, grinning.

xxx

As Ginny tugged on her Quidditch boots for the try-outs, she couldn't help but think that it would be amusing if she tried out but didn't actually make the team.

I suppose I could always just fly badly... miss every shot... forget to catch the Quaffle... I could even get hit in the head by it... she snickered to herself.

The other Slytherins gave this spontaneous laughter an odd look, but didn't say anything, and looked away, their faces all saying, 'okay, ignoring the weird crazy girl'...

She grabbed her broomstick and headed out onto the field. She was the first one out of the changing rooms, except, of course, for Jack Swithin, and because of it asked if as a favour maybe the Chasers could try out first.

"We're only trying out the Chasers," Jack pointed out. "Everyone else is fine, but whatever. Just wait your turn to fly circles 'round everyone else."

Ginny beamed at him.

As promised, the Chasers were up first – and last. As Ginny shot into the air, she changed her mind about failing on purpose and fired a score of thirteen goals. Again, Rupert Flax was selected as the second Chaser, and then the third.

A fourth-year that Ginny vaguely recognised scored seven goals – close to Flax' score of nine. Perhaps he would get it.

A very large Hispanic boy tried out, who looked far too heavy to even stay in the air, but moved with surprising agility. Maybe him – he was very fast, but sometimes got distracted.

Then, about sixth or seventh to try out, Ginny was pleased to see another girl, maybe fifth-year. She didn't look terribly confident as she clung to her broomstick, staring up at the sky with wide dark eyes. When she finally got into the air, she flew really well – nothing on Dominic, of course – but every time that the Quaffle was passed from below her, she flinched and nearly fell off the broomstick. Either way, she scored more than the others by a stroke.

“New Chasers,” Jack announced after some deliberation, once everyone had their go, “are Ginevra Peregrine, Rupert Flax, and Cleopatra Everett.”

Several people snickered behind their hands. Even Ginny raised her eyebrows.

The fifth-year girl, Cleopatra – no, Everett – calling her Cleopatra was just too weird – Everett glared around at them all.

“Hey,” Ginny said, trying to be friendly, as they headed back to the broom cupboard together. “Well done, by the way. You did a good job up there.”

Everett glowered. “I’ll just say now,” she snapped, “that while I may be younger than most of you, and not as good as most of you, I’m not going to be pressured off the time by stupid remarks about my name or a fear of heights. Okay?”

You’re scared of heights?

“Okay,” Ginny muttered, falling back. So much for trying to be nice. This seemed to happen a lot to her. She attempted to make friends, and she got snarled at. Life was so much more complicated in Slytherin, where the trustworthy were people to be suspicious of. Though she’d never admit it, things were simpler in Gryffindor.

xxx

A/N: Oops... I woke my brother up... and now he’s cranky... he won’t stop yelling... lol. He’s sixteen. It sounds like he’s a baby. Anyway. My foot hurts. I’m bored. If you had a question in your review, scroll down to the review replies... please review again!

Next Time:

“He got you a star?” Grace demanded. “You ask him to prove his love, and he buys you a chunk of flaming rock that you can’t even see?”

“Hey,” said Ginny, offended. “I like Astronomy.”

“So do I – it doesn’t mean that it’s any less stupid to buy someone a star,” Grace scoffed.

xxx

Right. Review replies.

Sarah1281: As I said at the top of the chapter, Bernard is lying about the whole Ministry-abnormality thing, because he knows that Tom’s “problem” is one of thing that she worries most about. Also, she’s kind of naïve and because she came from the War, and everything is so much more peaceful here, she sort of gets the idea that everything’s perfect. She sort of forgave Scott about getting Tom in prison, so she sort of forgave Bernard as well, but not as much, which is why she’s really sceptical about Ministries plotting to kill her and stuff. About the Scott being a Casanova, yes, he basically was, but people change. Before Ginny, he had always been able to get any girl he wanted, and throw them away when he wanted someone else. Ginny was the only girl who fought back – she broke his nose. Also, Ginny was the only girl who wouldn’t fall for him when he turned the charms on again, and over the summer he grew up a bit. And then fell in love with her.

GoldenTresses91: Er, it’s not that important, but it’s basically that Bernard is trying to blackmail her into being with him again, and it will have some minor importance in Fast-Forward.

Sb: YAY! An American person! Well, we don’t really call Americans yanks all the time. Mostly we just say ‘American people’. We mostly use it as a joke, like saying to someone who has a weird accent. Not that the American accent is weird... Thanks!

Okay, so that wasn’t loads, but still. It’s more than I normally get.

Please review!

If you want to ask a question, I would love to answer it, as it’s not like I have a real life anyway.

Xxx

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Stronger Than This

Her breath caught. Holy crap. He hadn't bought her a telescope. He'd bought her a star.

"Okay," Ginny muttered, falling back. So much for trying to be nice to Everett. This seemed to happen a lot to her. She attempted to make friends, and she got snarled at. Life was so much more complicated in Slytherin, where the trustworthy were people to be suspicious of. Though she'd never admit it, things were simpler in Gryffindor.

xxx

"He got you a star?" Grace demanded. "You ask him to prove his love, and he buys you a chunk of flaming rock that you can't even see?"

"Hey," said Ginny, offended. "I like Astronomy."

"So do I – it doesn't mean that it's any less stupid to buy someone a star," Grace scoffed.

"How do you know, anyway?" Ginny frowned, looking up from her revision. She had deliberately avoided telling the brunette, because she had been aware of this kind of reaction happening.

"Pippa told me."

Ginny scowled. Philippa was so dead.

She had only told the Ravenclaw because she knew that Philippa would be gushingly supportive, which, annoying as it was, made her feel better about not just sending him away to die in a gutter somewhere, which most of her friends would have paid to see.

They didn't speak again until the end of the day.

This speech was not a good thing, either. It was because after dinner, when they went down to the Slytherin common room in silence, Alden trailing behind them, trying – and failing – to force conversation, Ginny accidentally wondered aloud what else Tom what do.

Grace gave her a disgusted look, and Ginny cringed. She wanted to hold onto Alden for support, but he was leaving them now to head up to his own dormitory. She moved more quickly to the seventh-year girls' dormitory, but things only got worse when she noticed the folded piece of parchment on her pillow. Again.

And this time there was a flower on top.

Ginny gasped. She dived forwards, crushing both in her fist and hiding them behind her back. Then, wincing in anticipation, she turned to peek at Grace.

"Subtle." Grace crossed to her bed. "Look, I'm not going to tell you what to do-"

"Good."

"-but I'm going to recommend that you get rid of that stupid little flower and that stupid letter and have no regrets about it," the brunette finished.

"If I get rid of it, I will have regrets."

"I just don't want to see you get crushed again, Ginny. I mean, he's going to get your hopes all built up by throwing all of this crap at you-"

"He's not throwing crap at me!" Ginny protested.

"You're right." Grace's eyebrows lifted. "He's throwing flowers and heartfelt letters of adoration." She jabbed her fingers into her mouth to mime throwing up.

"Will you just leave it alone?" Ginny said angrily. "I'm not seven – I'm older than you, and I can do what I want without my friend babysitting me!"

"I saved your life," Grace growled.

"I never said you didn't, and I never said I wasn't grateful."

"I saved you, and if this all goes wrong, then that would have been a waste of time, wouldn't it, because you'd just mope and waste your life away with your tears and 'he doesn't care anymore's."

"You've never liked him, that's all!" Ginny was going red. "You don't like the fact that I've had a boyfriend who's way more loyal than anyone you ever have a chance with!"

"Loyalty?" Grace's expression hadn't changed in the slightest, but her voice had dropped to sub-zero. "Oh, so that's what you call it when he throws you away like last week's lunch..."

"Keep out of it!" Ginny snapped. "You don't have to like it, or be happy about it. You don't have to be involved! Hell, you shouldn't be involved! This isn't your ex-boyfriend I'm dealing with – it's mine! Why are you so against everything I decide to do for myself?"

"All I'm saying is that Alden-"

"Don't use Alden as an example!" she snarled. "You can't say that this is the same, because I'm sorry, but Alden doesn't want you back, and apparently, Tom wants me back! If your precious little Alden dropped to his knees and grovelled to you, you'd take him back, wouldn't you?"

Grace flinched, and there were tears in her eyes now. "Trying to kiss me on New Year's Eve and saying that he's not sure, but that he might still love me? If that isn't wanting me back, then I don't know what is. But it happened, and you know that I walked away."

Guilt and pain stabbed sharply into Ginny's stomach. She didn't answer this, but even if she had wanted to, she didn't get the chance to, because Grace whirled away and disappeared back up the stairs.

A sigh tore through Ginny's lips, and she sank onto her bed with a squeak of springs. "I'm so stupid," she muttered. "Grace's right."

Yet, still, this didn't stop her from uncurling her fingers and looking at the destroyed, crumpled yellow primrose on her palm. She tossed it

away; worthless now. She unfolded the parchment. This one was also more than one page. It was four pages.

The first was a note.

Ginevra,

Admit it, you knew this was coming. Poems to make you cringe. I don't blame you if you set fire to them, honestly. The first one you already know.

I love you.

Tom

The second was a poem, as he'd said. Indeed, it was one that she'd already seen. It was the first poem that she'd been given, for Valentine's Day – about her, tilted 'Ginevra'. The second, she'd also seen, though he'd never know it. She'd seen it in Dumbledore's Pensieve, when she had briefly returned to the future. It was also, in a way, about her – about falling in love with her, titled 'Silhouette'. The third...

She turned the page.

Do you know where my heart is

Do you think you can find it

Do you think that's it's somewhere

Do you think that's it's anywhere

Do you think it exists at all

That was but a split-decision made in anger

An idiot's choice that'll haunt an idiot forever

There's nothing that I'm loathe to do

To attempt to make it up to you
Do you think it exists at all
How am I supposed to be happy
When my chest is bleakly empty
I'm falling even more in love with you
Letting go of all I held onto
Do you think that heart, my heart exists at all
I'll give you my theory
So that you'll see clearly
I have a heart, incredulously
And it doesn't belong to me
It beats in the hands of a tiny
Freckled, red-haired beauty
Do you still think it exists at all
I'm on fire when you're near me
How do I breathe, remind me
I think you're holding my heart too tight
Far too tightly, for my biased sight
But never let it go
Never let it go

She closed her eyes. It truly wasn't fair how he knew exactly how to stop her breath, stop her heartbeat... how to make her fall back into his arms like the crash of a building falling down.

She thought that she was stronger than that.

Secretly, she was glad that she wasn't.

xxx

Philippa was glaring as though someone had just insulted the Caribbean island where she came from – something that happened a lot, and no-one wanted to be on the wrong end of that glare.

"You," she barked at Ginny, shoving her towards a chair. "Sit!" She switched her glare to Grace. "You too!"

Not wanting to be pushed, Grace sat meekly in the chair beside the redhead.

"You two are best friends," Philippa snapped. "I'm only ever going to be second-best when it comes to you guys, but I don't give a damn about that. My point is that when I suddenly become your one and only, I know that something's up. So sort it out! Because I can't handle both of you slagging each other off every waking moment to me!"

Ginny said nothing. She wanted to return to being friends with Grace, but somehow she didn't think that the other girl was having the same thoughts.

Surprisingly though, Grace apparently was, because she heaved a sigh. "Okay, Pippa, that's enough on your part. We're sorry for dragging you into this." She said this all very firmly, and the unspoken and now you can go away was obvious.

Understanding, Philippa nodded, triumphant, and then moved from the empty classroom where she had forced Ginny and Grace together in a free period after lunch.

After a brief silence, Grace cleared her throat. She turned to Ginny, but didn't look at her. "Okay, I know that you already know this, but if you gloat, then I'm going to walk away and never look back."

"Know what?" Ginny was bewildered. "Don't – don't go – I – what do I know?"

Grace's face screwed up in self-annoyance. "Oh, come on, Ginny," she said angrily. "It's obvious that I'm crazy jealous."

Ginny blinked.

"I mean – he wrote you poetry. He didn't go behind your back when he was away from you for a whole year. He asked you to marry him. Okay, so he breaks up with you, but it's only going to be some stupid noble reason. What do you know, within two months he's pleading for you to take him back – and he – he bought you a star!" Grace sounded close to tears now. "It's horrible, I know, but... but..." she swallowed, "...I was so desperate for this to be real." She buried her face in her hands. "More than anything," she confessed quietly, "I wanted for him to crush you. Destroy you. That sole imperfection that you would find – that he wouldn't love you."

Tears choked up Ginny's throat, but she had held back all of that stupid crying for so many years of her life, and all of this stupid Tom business was making her cry all the time like a stupid baby. She refused to cry now.

Ginny gulped past a lump in her throat. She shifted out of her chair and crouched beside Grace. She reached up, pushed the brunette's hands back, and wiped the tears from her cheeks with pale, cool fingers. "If it's any consolation," she whispered, "he's the furthest from perfect that you can imagine." She bit her lower lip. "When I let him out, he wasn't innocent."

Grace had no reaction. Ginny suspected that she'd known all along.

xxx

A/N: Yeah... that was a crappy chapter. Crappy start, crappy middle, really crappy ending. I may as well just be a pile of crap. Sorry for how crappy it was. Yes, it's also fairly obvious that the vast majority of his poem was stolen song lyrics. Oh well. Get over it. ... I'm so gloomy today. I need some happy pills.

Next Time:

"...Thanks." The low, reluctant mutter from the only other female in the Quidditch changing rooms startled Ginny. She looked up to see a flash of scarlet across Everett's dark cheeks.

She was in her dormitory within the next two minutes, and thinking with bliss of the hot shower, and simultaneously cursing bad Scottish weather. She wrapped a towel around herself, and left to the bathroom.

...came back.

...did a double-take.

...and decided that a shower took priority to the neatly folded letter on her pillow.

xxx

I had this funny mental video for a time-travel thing. Like, Ginny's talking to Dumbledore about Evil!Tom.

Ginny: Oh, great! How am I supposed to get close to him? He's smart, he's a Prefect, he's Head Boy, he's popular, he's sporty, he's good-looking – geez! Is there any aspect of him that isn't perfect?

Dumbledore: ... He becomes Lord Voldemort.

Ginny: Oh yeah.

Hahahaha. Funny...

Chapter Forty: Prioritise

Grace's face screwed up in self-annoyance. "Oh, come on, Ginny," she said angrily. "It's obvious that I'm crazy jealous."

"If it's any consolation," Ginny whispered, "he's the furthest from perfect that you can imagine." She bit her lower lip. "When I let him out, he wasn't innocent." Grace had no reaction. Ginny suspected that she'd known all along.

xxx

The Slytherin-Hufflepuff Quidditch match was on the last day of March, on a Wednesday. It was raining heavily, and windy, and Ginny wasn't really looking forwards to it. She'd be wet, and cold, and worst of all, she'd have to deal with Cleopatra Everett.

That name still made her giggle.

On the way down to the pitch, using her emerald green Quidditch robe as an umbrella over her head, Ginny ran into Bernard.

"Hey!" she yelled at him over the pounding rain. "Are you planning or turning up for the game or not? Let's go."

"You're planning to get back together with Riddle, aren't ya?" he said, totally disregarding what she'd said.

Ginny rolled her eyes. She shifted her makeshift umbrella over her head. "Can we talk about this later? We're going to be late, and I really don't want to stand around in the rain anyway."

"No, we need to talk about it now." Bernard didn't seem to care that the sky was chucking it down. His hair was dark from being saturated with water, droplets of rain trailing down his nose... he looked like a guy from a shampoo advert.

She hoped he hadn't heard that.

“Bernard,” she growled, “a wet Ginny is not a happy Ginny. Make it quick.”

“The abnormality thing again-”

“Oh, not that!” Ginny groaned. “I don’t want to hear it, Terby.”

“-if you wanna attract more attention to yourself, then by all means continue with this-”

“I’m not listening...”

“-but you’re gonna get yourself-”

“I’m walking away now.”

“-killed, and despite your frequent death threats, I care about ya-”

“Goodbye, Terby.”

“-and I don’ want ya to get hurt-”

She turned away from him and hurried on towards the Slytherin changing rooms to get ready for the oncoming Quidditch game. She didn’t want to think about what she had been unable to tune out from Bernard’s voice. He was stupid. He fancied her. Of course he would say things like that.

He was just making it all up.

Right?

Ignoring this – it wouldn’t help her concentrate on the Quaffle – Ginny quickly pulled her Quidditch robes over her baggy grey T-shirt and pulled on the green flight leggings before removing her skirt. She’d had a lot of practice with this, and the males of the Quidditch team had long got over their disappointment.

She tied her hair back into a tight bun high on her head. She was glad that she didn't have a fringe anymore, as now when she tied her hair up, it actually all stayed up without a billion pins and clips.

"Okay. Monsieur Swithin, I'm ready to roll," she told the Captain, scratching her nose as she stood before him. "Any tips for today?"

"Try to slow down the time between catching and passing the Quaffle on," Jack advised. "You can pass the fastest, easily, but that's not we're trying to do here. You sometimes overshoot or aren't as accurate as you could be because you don't give yourself time to aim." He scratched his big moustache. "Er. Avoid Bludgers. That's always a good one, for you. And... and that's it, I think."

"Thanks." Ginny flashed him a big smile, and grabbed her broomstick from the cupboard, balancing it on two fingers for shallow amusement while waiting for everyone else to finish getting ready.

Pep-talk over, they moved out onto the pitch.

It was like someone had tipped a bucket over Ginny's head – that was how quickly she became sodden to the skin. A few strands of red hair twisted free and plastered across her forehead.

When they lined up opposite the Hufflepuffs, Ginny couldn't even see them. She could just distinguish blurs of yellow with faces shaking from the cold.

I hope I can find the hoops.

Somewhere a whistle blew. Startled, Ginny shot into the air, but couldn't see the Quaffle.

Aw, damnit!

She followed the blurs of yellow, and could make out the maroon blur of the misshapen ball that she was supposed to fly away from the Hufflepuffs with, not the other way around.

Weaving upwards, she tried to snatch it out of the air, but her vertically challenged stature let it go straight over her head, and a bell tolled somewhere to her left to let her know that Hufflepuff had scored a point.

“TERBY!” she hollered backwards at the sixth-year Keeper.

A Quaffle hit her hands so hard that she jolted backwards, but then she whirled away and flew.

Left – right – past a Hufflepuff – throwing it on –

“-and the new addition to the Slytherin Quidditch team, Cleopatra Everett, has the Quaffle. She replaced young Dominic Philips after his Bludger accident, but will she meet up to the ex-Chaser’s standard? She throws it on to Flax – back to Everett – Everett score!”

“NICE ONE!” Ginny shouted across to the younger girl. She suspected that maybe Everett felt more confident now because, due to rushing of rain all around her, she couldn’t see the ground, and therefore couldn’t acknowledge how high she was above it.

“Huxley passes to Tanner – Tanner to Sristavi – Conventry – Tanner-”

Andrew Tanner, Ginny recalled was the twin brother of Charlotte Tanner, one of the evil Gryffindors who’d beaten her up in the dungeons at one point. They looked almost identical, save for gender, but were in different houses. Ginny wondered if their personalities were similar, and if tackling him was a good idea.

Oh well.

Whack.

“-spectacular tackle from Peregrine of the Slytherin team, passing to Flax, to Everett - Everett drops the Quaffle!”

The clouds had suddenly parted, splashing bright sunshine across everyone, and Everett had obviously noticed the floor of the Quidditch pitch... at least fifty feet below her.

Ginny dived, pressing herself flat against her broomstick to make herself more streamlined, and snatched it out of the air before tossing it onwards to Flax.

“Keep your eyes up!” she yelled to Everett over her shoulder. “I’ll tell Flax to only pass to you from above!”

Everett didn’t say anything in response, as she was shivering and staring at the ground below her.

Ginny zoomed away, passing on the message to Rupert Flax and continuing to play.

The points ticked up. Slytherin took the lead, then Hufflepuff dragged its way in front. Slytherin overtook again – Hufflepuff fell behind, then dramatically fought back – Slytherin – Hufflepuff – Slytherin –

One-hundred-thirty to one-hundred-ten...

So fast that the redhead’s eyes lost focus, the Slytherin seeker, Vegrandis, fired off in a seemingly random direction like a jade-hued bullet.

She pulled her arm back and threw the Quaffle that she held so hard that her arm would hurt for hours afterwards, taking advantage of the brief distraction to score.

One-hundred-thirty ticked up to one-hundred-forty as the burgundy ball soared through Robin Huxley’s outstretched, and then, with an explosion of applause and cheers, ticked up to two-hundred-ninety as Vegrandis’ slim fingers closed around a small, struggling Snitch.

“YEAH!” Ginny yelled. She spun her broomstick around in a stupid twirl, nearly crashing into a Hufflepuff. “Sorry,” she called to him over the sound of the rain, which was still pouring maniacally despite the new sunshine.

"Well done, you lot," Jack grunted when they got down to the ground.

"Thanks!" Grinning happily at their victory, but shivering, Ginny sprinted back to the changing rooms.

"God, I'm freezing," Ginny chattered through her smile at Everett, as she tugged off her saturated outer robe.

"That's nice," Everett muttered sarcastically, tugging a hairbrush through her tangled dark-brown waves, and then moved away.

...I can not be bothered to make friends anymore. Ginny scowled. Screw you. She grabbed her shed clothes from where they dripped rainwater on the stone floor, and then walked back into the storm. There would have been no point in casting a Drying Charm when she was only going to get wet again. She was just going to go back up to the castle and have a shower.

"...Thanks."

The low, reluctant mutter from the only other female in the Quidditch changing rooms startled Ginny. She looked up to see a flash of scarlet across Everett's dark cheeks.

"...For telling Flax to pass to me from above, I mean," Everett clarified in a mumble, before grabbing a towel and leaving.

Ginny had no idea where Alden, Philippa or Grace were, she realised as she left shortly, but then again she was sure that she'd catch up with them later. Anyway, she didn't really need to find them. She didn't feel lonely or anything, and they had each other.

With every step she took, once through the Entrance Hall doors, she let loose a cascade of rainwater. Her grandfather, Epaphras Weasley (the caretaker) glowered at her from the corner, where he clutched a mop and his wand.

"Sorry!" she yelled across to him, and grinned a thank-you at the people congratulating her, before continuing on her way.

She was in her dormitory within the next two minutes, and thinking with bliss of the hot shower, and simultaneously cursing bad Scottish weather. She wrapped a towel around herself, and left to the bathroom.

...came back.

...did a double-take.

...and decided that a shower took priority to the neatly folded letter on her pillow.

Fifteen minutes and a lot of hot water later, she emerged from the bathroom in her yellow dungarees and a purple woollen jumper that Eleanor Fionn had given her a year ago. She padded across the room, leaving damp footprints behind her, and dumped herself, cross-legged, onto her bed.

Opening the letter, a small envelope and a piece of parchment fell out. She read the parchment first.

Ginevra,

I thought you'd enjoy this. I asked Philips what your favourite team is. Please be there. It's important.

I love you.

Tom

Frowning with curious anticipation – her favourite team? – she opened the tiny envelope that had dropped into her lap. When she pushed her fingers inside, she found that there were three small black tickets waiting... one had upon it in tiny cursive Ginevra, another had Hartwin, and the last, Decrow. They were emblazoned with the words THE OTHLEY OGRES... and picture of a large orange ogre.

“Ohmigod!” she squealed to no-one in particular, clapping her hands together. “Quidditch tickets!”

Why did he need her to be there so badly? Of course she was going to go! Important... he didn't even like Quidditch.

Who cares?

She leapt up and danced a short way towards the wall, where a massive orange poster displayed an aggressive-looking wizard with a large nose gripping a Quaffle, the words Dean Lerwick.

"I shall see you soon, my darling," she cooed to her favourite Quidditch player, and then couldn't help but squeal all over again.

xxx

A/N: Hm... it's important, eh? I wonder, I wonder. Well, you'll have to wait until the next chapter to find out. I love the next chapter. Luffit, luffit, luffit. Please review!

Next Time:

"Are you ready yet?" asked Grace wearily, leaning against the door to the dormitory.

"Nearly." Ginny made the finishing touches to her bright orange face-paint, and then beamed at her reflection in the mirror. She looked like she was on fire. Red hair, orange face, orange clothes. "There we go."

Xxx

Chapter Forty-One: Forever

“Ohmigod!” she squealed to no-one in particular, clapping her hands together. “Quidditch tickets!” Why did he need her to be there so badly? Of course she was going to go! Important... he didn’t even like Quidditch. Who cares?

She leapt up and danced a short way towards the wall, where a massive orange poster displayed an aggressive-looking wizard with a large nose gripping a Quaffle. “I shall see you soon, my darling,” she cooed to her favourite Quidditch player, and then couldn’t help but squeal all over again.

xxx

I love her too much

I’m starting to panic

Remember, she asked you

Remember to...

Breathe

Now that Grace was friends with Ginny again, she was more than happy to come to the Quidditch match with her. Philippa, however, was becoming annoying. Ginny had begun to wish that she hadn’t told the Ravenclaw that she was invited.

Her reaction went as follows:

“Ohmigod! He went to the trouble to ask Alden what your favourite Quidditch team was, and he bought you tickets! That’s so cute! These must have been really expensive! That’s lovely of him! I wonder what he’s going to do when you’re there. I wonder why he needs you to turn up. Maybe he’s going to meet you there. Aw, that’s so romantic!”

It was enough to make Ginny vomit.

She thought that Alden might be a bit irritated that he wasn't invited, but perhaps he wasn't coming because he already knew whatever Philippa was positive was going to happen. Either way, he didn't seem that bothered, and he refused to say anything about whether or not Tom was planning something for the Quidditch game which was why she had to be there.

"Are you ready yet?" asked Grace wearily, leaning against the door to the dormitory.

"Nearly." Ginny made the finishing touches to her bright orange face-paint, and then beamed at her reflection in the mirror. She looked like she was on fire. Red hair, orange face, orange clothes. "There we go."

Grace snorted. "Nice."

"I'm on firrrreee!"

"Actually, you don't look like you're on fire. You just sort of look like a tangerine."

Ginny scowled.

Together they skipped down to the Entrance Hall, Ginny teaching Grace the many songs and chants of the Othley Ogres. By the time that Philippa arrived, most of the people around them were getting thoroughly sick of a large tangerine screeching echoes of, "Who do you love – who do you adore – when they fly off – you still want more – OTHLEY – OGRES!"

"You're late," Grace complained to the Ravenclaw who had just turned up.

"If we've missed the opening bit, I'm going to bite you," said Ginny, and they literally sprinted down to the edge of the Hogwarts grounds.

Crack.

They appeared by the Othley stadium; waved their tickets at a burly man with a moustache; struggled their hardest to find seats.

“I want to buy a Dean Lerwick card!” Ginny declared. “One of those shiny ones! You know the ones. Let’s go!”

“We need to find seats-” Philippa tried to make the redhead see sense, but was drowned out by loud off-key singing of the name, “DEEEAN LEEERWIIIIICK!”

Philippa sighed, rolling her green eyes. “Fine.”

“Yay!” Ginny squealed, and hurried away to find a stall where she could buy a Dean Lerwick card. It wasn’t that much of a task, as Lerwick was the favourite, and every shop sold not only cards of him, but posters and mugs and even big banners that shouted ‘I LOVE DEAN’ in a squeaky voice. Ginny couldn’t resist buying a big foam hand, and then returned to where Grace and Philippa were sat.

Within the next ten minutes, the opening started. With an explosion of trademark orange flames, three large ogres zoomed into the air, roared so loudly that Ginny’s eardrums shook, and then caught fire, disappearing in a haze of smoke and flames. Then, the opposite team, the Diskin Devils, let loose their mascots. They were seven or eight women, all dressed in black, but with long flowing crimson hair that contrasted sharply with their pale faces and dark clothes.

“There you go,” said Grace. “Future occupation – Diskin Devils’ mascot.”

“Fat chance!” Ginny yelled. “OTHLEY! OTHLEY!”

“Welcome to the Othley stadium for the Home match of Othley versus the Away team of the Diskin Devils!” the commentator began, the image of the two Quidditch teams flying out from the sidelines being flashed up on a big screen. This sight was met by a roar of approval. “Today we have, from Othley – Calvert – Honnor – Munroe – Rohan – Bigg – Lerwick – and Foy!”

Ginny screamed her lungs out, clapping as hard as she could, but made no impression of noise against everyone else's cheering.

"From Diskin – Galveston – Rayce – Boleyn – Corbett – Hayes – Vine – and Martin!"

"BOO!" Ginny stomped her feet, and promptly fell over. She leapt right back up to continue booing the opposition.

The Quaffle was tossed up, and in a blur of black and orange, like Hallowe'en colours, it disappeared.

On the big screen in front, it showed who had the Quaffle, but the Chasers were passing so fast that the image flickered like static between each person, and it made her dizzy. She could only identify one Chaser – the broad-shouldered, dark one – and cheered, "LERWICK!" every time he had the Quaffle, but again, they passed so fast that she ended up going, "LER-LER-LERW-LER-"

"Rohan to Bigg – Rohan again – Lerwick – Rohan – Bigg – no, that was a feint – Rohan's still got it – tackle from Corbett – Rayce – Boleyn – Rayce – Corbett again – he's their star scorer – will he score – will he sc – DISKIN SCORE!" yelled the commentator at high-speed.

"BOO!"

"Diskin in the lead, ten-nil – Calvert, the Othley Ogres Keeper, been there for seven years, brilliant job he's done so far, passes down below the hoops to Bigg – risky, that – Bigg's gone – Rohan – Lerwick-"

"LERWICK!" Ginny screeched, waving her foam hand frantically as he zoomed towards her. "HI!"

Dean Lerwick turned his head to her slightly, and in a split-second, she was able to distinguish a big nose, dark hair, olive complexion... and he winked at her.

Ginny stared long after he'd disappeared into the blur of players. "Catch me," she declared to Philippa and Grace. "I'm going to faint."

Grace laughed.

The Othley Ogres were winning seventy-sixty when a short break was called. They were playing fantastically, and against any lesser team, would have score a million points, but Ginny had to begrudgingly admit that the Diskin Devils were brilliant as well, and it was very difficult for either one of them to score.

"Why are we having a break?" asked Ginny. "We never usually have a break in Quidditch."

"I dunno." Grace shrugged. "Maybe Lerwick needs to pee or something."

"They wouldn't stop the whole game because one player on one team needed the toilet," Philippa said witheringly. "I reckon that this is where Riddle shows up."

"Right." Ginny rolled her eyes. "No, I think that's it because Foy took a Bludger to the stomach. He played really well after that, considering how much it must have hurt, but maybe they need to check that halfway through catching the Snitch he's not going to throw up his guts or anything."

The other two girls gave her a look of disgust. "Ew."

"Well, either way," the redhead said, "I'm getting a hotdog. And a pumpkin juice or something. It's so hot here."

"Coolsville."

They weaved out of their part of the audience, through the seats and through the many complaining people, to get to the same stall where Ginny had previously bought her Dean Lerwick card.

She, Grace and Philippa came back with their hot-dogs and drinks just as the referee blew his whistle and shouted that the break was

finished. They settled into their seats to watch the rest of the Quidditch match, but the game didn't start up again.

"Is something wrong?" Philippa wondered.

"Maybe Foy did throw up his guts," mused Ginny.

"Ginny!" exclaimed Grace in horror. "Please! Stop!"

Then, on the massive screen that was used to flash up the images of who had the Quaffle at that moment, or other players as they played, an image of someone flashed up who was definitely not a Quidditch player.

Ginny's mouth fell open, as Philippa shrieked happily, "I told you so!" Grace stared with a similar expression of shock to the expression on Ginny's own face.

"What. The. Hell. Is. He. Doing. Here."

"Hello," Tom said - rather pathetically, actually. He cleared his throat. "Er. Sorry about delaying the second-half of the Quidditch game like this, but I have an announcement to make."

Ginny dropped her hot dog, splattering mustard all over herself. She didn't really notice, or even care.

"The majority of you probably recognise me; I-I'm the one who was arrested about two months ago for killing all of those Muggles... you saw my photograph, I'll presume, in the newspaper, and then I was released by this girl called Ginevra Peregrine-"

Ginny dropped her pumpkin juice. It sprayed across her skirt. Philippa and Grace began to laugh.

"-who is, without a single second of hesitation, the most amazing, beautiful person I've ever met, and who... who..." Tom coughed nervously, and on the magical speakers displayed everywhere in the audience, it was fairly obvious to hear the starting syndromes of hyperventilating, "...who I happen to be completely in love with."

A loud “awww” came from the whole audience, including a slightly shocked Grace. Philippa nearly had a fit, she was squealing so loudly. Ginny slumped back in her chair, hiding her face in her hands.

Tom was flushing on screen. Ginny knew why this was the final proof. He hated his emotions. He hated anyone knowing that he had emotions. He hated telling people his emotions, even in private. And now he was telling a million people, in a Quidditch stadium, which was also going to be recorded on the radio.

“However, I’m horrified to say that I did something terrible to her. It... it nearly killed her, when I thought that I was helping her, saving her. I thought that I was setting her free – I didn’t care if it hurt me, as long as she was happy... but she nearly died.”

Tom swallowed hard, and anxiety suddenly flooded his face.

“Er. Actually... I-I bought her tickets to this Quidditch match, and insisted that she be here... I said it was important... but I have no idea if she’s even here...” he admitted.

Whispers went through the audience. Someone yelled, “Get out with the match!”

Tom coloured more at this, but ignored that outburst. “Er. She’s kind of small, and thin, and she’s got really bright red hair,” he explained. “She’s the beautiful one.”

Oh, God. Let me die now.

A woman on the other side of the pitch hollered, “I’M PRETTY!”, to the laughter and amusement of people listening.

“SHE’S HERE!” Philippa, standing up, suddenly yelled at the top of her lungs. “OI, RIDDLE! OVER HERE!” She flailed her arms frantically, leaping up and down. “HERE!”

Ginny shrunk back into her chair while laughter echoed and echoed around her, and more shouting came from the helpful audience, who she made a mental note to kill later. She could feel her face on fire.

The colour of Tom's face was now quite pink.

Philippa and Grace dragged her to her feet and pushed her to the front of the box they were in, squishing her against the balcony. "HERE!" they screamed.

"I HATE YOU," Ginny screamed straight back at them, much to the glee of everyone in the entire world who was listening. Then, reluctantly, she turned back to the screen.

"Hi," she said weakly, waving at him with her massive foam hand.

To her utmost horror, an unseen camera zoomed in on her, and her orange face, suddenly more scarlet than orange, appeared on the big screen. It then flashed back to Tom again.

"Er. Hello," he said, lifting one hand briefly in a feeble wave. "Er. I... I love you, Ginevra. A-and I don't blame you at all if you just want to ignore me now and run away from the stadium, because personally I wouldn't find this romantic at all, I'd just find it really embarrassing, and also because... because I know that... that I destroyed you. So all that I have left to say before I let you all get back to your Quidditch game is, er... is that if you can bear to even look at my hideous face again, then I'll meet you... er. Somewhere. Oh, crap. I can't remember where I decided to meet you. Er. Crap. Sorry for the language, if there are small children here."

Tom was practically bright red now.

"Forget where I'm going to meet you, just ignore that whole last part of my speech," he said hurriedly, "and... yes. That's all that I can do to prove that what I say is true. Except..." he swallowed. "Except for one thing."

She had a very bad feeling about this.

“I know that this is stupid and not really traditional because you probably hate me right now and I haven’t asked your best friend’s permission or anything-”

Ginny instantly knew what was coming next. Her head spun.

“-and in fact, I can’t even see you – I mean, I know roughly that you’re over there somewhere... in that corner... but I actually have no idea where you are, so it’s about as untraditional as it gets-”

Ginny’s eyes lost focus as she stared blankly into space.

“-but... but I... I I-love you so much, and this is the only way that I can think of proving it, so Ginevra Aiobheann Peregrine, I was wondering-”

She stopped breathing.

“-if you wanted to marry me?”

As applause and screams and cheers (and a, “Now get back to the match!”) broke out, Ginny keeled silently backwards and hit the floor in a dead faint.

The last thing she heard was Grace proudly shouting to Tom, “SHE’S FAINTED!” and then all went dark.

xxx

When she woke up a minute later, Tom’s face was gone from the massive screen and was instead replaced by flying Quidditch players going at the speed of light.

“Tell me who wins!” she said to Grace and Philippa, and hurried out of the box. Suddenly Dean Lerwick didn’t seem very important.

Down the stairs... through the gates...

From what had been behind Tom when he was on the screen, Ginny had worked out that he had been on the main filming platform, which

meant that he was on the other side of the stadium, which meant that he would come out on the other side – he hated Quidditch, so he'd probably come out immediately. He wouldn't watch. He'd be going already.

However, the stadium was massive, and to go around would take longer than the limited time that she had to find him.

Ginny sprinted.

She ran as fast as she could, her heart pounding in her ears, her breath coming ragged. Her feet barely touched the ground as she ran, just a fleeting touch before she moved on. She swerved around the guards' huts and ducked through a hole in a fence, and ran and ran and ran-

He was a couple of hundred metres from the Quidditch stadium, walking towards the Apparation zone-

She skidded to a stop, kicking up a cloud of dust on her clothes, already stained with mustard and pumpkin juice from when she dropped her food in astonishment. She took a moment to get her breath back, and then yelled happily, "TOM!"

Tom turned around, and she saw his still-slightly-coloured face light up with a mingled expression of embarrassment and gladness. They were about twenty metres apart, just standing there, looking at each other.

Then, a grin breaking out on her face, she walked slowly towards him. Instinct told her to run, but she'd probably fall over, after having got this far. Therefore, she walked. It seemed to take a lifetime, but then she was right up next to him, and she tilted her head back to look up into his face. "Hi," she said. "Nice speech."

Tom swallowed, reddening. "Thank you." A nervous smile twisted his lips. "Did you really faint?"

"Afraid so," she grinned. "You should know by now the dazzling effect you have on people."

"I'm sorry," he teased, "I just couldn't resist."

"I guessed as much," she said with a shrug. She took a deep breath. "Is there something you want to say to me in person?"

"Er." He hardly ever said er or um. He was Mr. Formal Language At All Times. Yet he seemed to be saying er and um a lot lately. "Yes, I suppose I do." He also drew in a deep breath, though he drew his out a lot longer than she had. "I... I love you."

She stood on tiptoe, tilting her chin up, so that her face was barely an inch from his. "That's nothing new," she said softly.

"I know." Tom looked slightly dazed. She noticed that he'd stopped breathing. "It doesn't mean that it's not true, though."

"I suppose," Ginny said thoughtfully. "Oh, and by the way... in answer to your question..." Here was the hard part. She inhaled and exhaled a few times to steady herself. It was okay. She was only agreeing to spending the rest of forever with him.

Tom's heartbeat was thundering loud enough for her to hear it. He hadn't breathed yet. "Yes?" he whispered, his voice barely audible despite the total silence around them.

"...Yeah. Yeah, I reckon I will marry you," she said, and before she'd even finished speaking, before she'd even completed the 'you' at the end, he let go of his breath in one short burst, moved his face down only the tiniest amount and crushed his lips to hers.

The world was a blur of things going on in their personal bubble, heightened senses – him pulling her closer – eyes closed – wavy hair tangled in her fingers – one hand curled around his neck – the other hand pressed to the front of his shirt – him holding her like he never wanted to let go -

"Do you think I've proved that I love you?" he suddenly murmured against her lips, breathing heavy.

“I think so.”

“And I’m still so eternally sorry for what I did to you.”

“It’s okay. You had good intentions. Anyway, I have you now, so that’s more important,” Ginny pointed out, pulling away slightly.

“But-”

“I have an idea, Tom. Shut up.”

“I-”

She silenced him with her lips. He didn’t seem to mind at all. Then, abruptly, he started laughing quietly – a very unusual sound in itself.

“What now?” she said, getting irritated.

He grinned at her, lighting up that masked face that most of the world could never see through. “I’ve just realised that I get to keep you forever.”

Ginny raised her eyebrows at him. “Forever is a long time, you know.” She smirked. “Anyway, to be annoying, I’ll have to correct you in saying that actually, it’s only ‘until death do us part’, you know.”

“Very well.” Tom twitched his shoulders in the slightest of shrugs. “There’s no-one I’d rather die with.”

“How romantic.”

“I know.”

He kissed her again.

xxx

A/N: Hahaha. That was awful. Yeah, I know, the proposal was probably too soon. I had also planned another one, so if you didn’t like this one, then you can ignore it and pretend that the one I’ve

typed up below is the real chapter. The next chapter is the last chapter of Press-Play! YAY! I tried to get it to a nice even number, but forty-two was the best I could do. Next is the voted-for summary chapter. Not too important, but whatever... Please review!

Here we go. The other possible proposal. I much preferred this one, but I couldn't fit it in, so I had to ditch it.

xxx

Her knees aching, Ginny climbed the final flight of stairs. Alden had recently bought his own apartment in southern Essex, and though the redhead was well used to apartments, this one was a lot higher up than Tom's, and also, it was a magical building, and had wards on it so that no-one could Apparate it.

It was infuriating.

I wonder what he wanted, she thought, panting as she trailed through the labyrinth of corridors looked for room seventy-nine. Her eyes flickered from each gold-plated number on each door. Seventy-three... seventy-five... seventy-seven... seventy-nine.

She lifted her closed fist to knock on the door, but it was already open a crack, and she pushed it open to peer inside.

Sitting on the sophisticated leather sofa was Alden, Grace and Philippa; standing stiffly in front of them and looking slightly awkward, Tom. The final of the three seated had a strange expression on her face, as though she was trying very hard not to burst out squealing.

That's odd, Ginny couldn't help but think. It's usually romantic stuff that gets Pippa on fluff-highs.

When Philippa noticed Ginny in the doorway, her expression grew even more tense with the struggle of not giggling. Grace's eyes flicked to her only once, and Alden didn't even look at her, though she knew that he was aware of her there.

What the hell is going on? Intrigued, she listened to what was being said – Tom was speaking to Alden mostly, and in a low, slightly nervous voice. What she heard caused her jaw to drop open.

“...and I simply thought that since her father is deceased, then you would probably be the most important male figure in her life, and... and basically the point is that I was wondering if you would give me your permission to ask her to, er, marry me.”

Ginny swayed, and grabbed hold of the doorframe so that she didn't fall over. Then, once her head had stopped spinning, her face took on an expression similar to the one on Philippa's face.

“You have my permission,” Alden said solemnly. “However, do you think that it would be possible for me to hear your planned proposal?” An uncharacteristically mischievous look was glinting in his eyes. “We could run it through for you and give any advice, if need be.”

“Very well,” Tom said, though he sounded more nervous than ever. “Er. Okay.” He swallowed. “... Ginevra.” A deep breath. He clasped his hands behind his back. “Ginevra, I do not know what course my life would have taken had you decided to continue with home-schooling, had you decided not to Hogwarts, had you decided not even to bother with me – but it would have been totally different. I don't know – maybe I would have done something with my life. Rich? Famous? Respected? I doubt it, but even had that been the case, I realise now that it would have been nothing with you.”

She wrapped her arms around her stomach and hugged herself tightly, a silly grin spreading across her lips. He loved her.

“I... I adore you, I honestly do, and I never want to have to live without you. People say that you don't what you have until it's gone, but I've lost you twice, and I am more than fully aware what I am the luckiest man alive to have you...”

Ginny's nose was tickling. She scratched it, but it didn't help.

“You've shown me...” Tom was evidently extremely uncomfortable at having to say this all to other people, not her, as he was fidgeting

tremendously behind his back. “You’ve shown me how to be happy – and I want to be this happy forever.”

She clapped a hand to her nose in a vain effort to keep it under control.

“I love you more than anything, Ginevra... er,” he cleared his throat, and awkwardly dropped down onto one knee (muttering, “I should probably practice this” as he went down), bringing his hands from behind his back. “Ginevra... Aiobheann... Peregrine...”

NOSE... ITCHING...

No, no, no! Stay – quiet!

“Will you marr-”

ACHOO!

The loudest sneeze ever to grace the planet earth exploded from Ginny, no matter how she tried to stop; she doubled up from the force of it, clinging to the door, which creaked loudly in protest, just in case people had somehow missed her alert as to the fact that she was there.

Philippa exploded into giggles, and Grace bit her lip to keep from joining. Even Alden was smiling, despite his attempt at a previously sombre expression.

“-y...” Tom trailed off, and his shoulders tensed, “...me...” Very slowly, as though he was dreading the sight behind him, he turned, still kneeling, to look over his shoulder at Ginny. “...Crap.”

Ginny tried to be cheerful about everything. “Well, I certainly know how to make an entrance, don’t I?”

Tom didn’t respond to what she’d said; just stared blankly at her and repeated, “...Crap.”

Letting go of the door that she only just acknowledged she was holding onto, Ginny took a few steps into the room, huffing her breath out through the side of her mouth. "Well." She took another step forwards, directly in front of the kneeling Tom. She raised her eyebrows as though what she'd overheard wasn't much important.

Not much important, and yet her brain was barely functioning, her heart-beat lost somewhere in her silent sighs of, oh good god I love him and he loves me and we're going to get married and live together for the rest of our lives...

Not much important.

He seemed to be thinking along the same lines, and said quietly, with a note of hopefulness, "Did you actually hear any of what I said?"

Ginny shrugged flippantly. "Just about all of it." She held her hands out. "Are you going to stand up, then?"

Tom stood up without her offered assistance, his arms listless by his sides, his apathetic face seeming almost tired, lost, forlorn, useless. He looked down bleakly at her, barely breathing

Now that he wasn't kneeling below her, Ginny took another step forwards, therefore putting herself very firmly inside his personal bubble. She was also trying very hard to ignore the muffled squeals of Philippa, the hissed shut-ups of Alden and Grace who were gagging her. She looked up at him through her lowered eyelashes.

"Yes," she said gently, reaching up and twining her arms around his neck. He seemed to have no reaction, just staring down at her, perhaps not understanding, perhaps in shock. She lifted herself onto tiptoes, a smile forming in miniscule on her face. "I would love to marry you."

Then she closed the small distance between them, pressing her lips to his unresisting mouth and tightening her arms around his neck.

For a few seconds, it seemed as though Tom had gone into shock, as there was no response – including breathing, and even his pulse

seemed to have forgotten what it was supposed to be doing – and then he reacted explosively, dragging her closer, his hands fitting perfectly to the curve of her waist, his mouth and hers each a piece of the world's most intricate puzzle...

"Ahem," Grace's voice said delicately, coughing.

Both were jerked back to reality. The heat that flooded into Tom's face was strong enough that Ginny could feel it radiating off him, and she too flushed red, though she beamed with happiness.

"No, don't mind us. Please continue attempting to snog the clothes off each other," Philippa said pleasantly, standing up. "We'll just leave you alone for a second." She then dragged the two others through the door, though giggles sounded on the other side of it once it was closed, and Ginny suspected that they were listening in.

"They haven't left, have they?" Tom confirmed her theory.

"Nope." Ginny flicked her wand at the door with a silent silencio. "Doesn't matter, though."

"Just to clarify," Tom said through laboured breathing, a slight smirk tugging at the corner of his lips, "that was not the way the proposal was intended to happen."

"What, you mean kneeling in my friend's apartment when you're asking for permission, having me break in with a sneeze, saying 'crap' and going into shock? But... I thought that was as romantic as it could have ever been."

"I could try to improve it by saying that I love you," the nineteen-year-old suggested.

"Or..." Ginny said, trailing off, and she fit the puzzle together, lifting her face fiercely to his.

xxx

That was as far as I went with it, as I saw no point in continuing it... seeing as, you know, it wasn't going to be in the fic. Well, I much preferred that proposal, but whatever. Next – summary-sort-of-chapter-ending. Also, I'll be finishing posting Backtrack before I start posting Fast Forward, which also gives me more time to write up more of FF.

Please review!

Chapter Forty-Two: This May Or May Not Be The End

“Do you think I’ve proved that I love you?” he suddenly murmured against her lips, breathing heavy. She silenced him with her lips. He didn’t seem to mind at all. Then, abruptly, he started laughing – a very unusual sound in itself. He grinned at her, lighting up that masked face that most of the world could never see through. “I’ve just realised that I get to keep you forever.” He kissed her again.

xxx

Is this in my head

I don’t know what to think

He kneels to the ground

And pulls out a ring,

And says:

Marry me, Juliet

So you’ll never be alone

I love you

And that’s all I really know

For Ginny, over the next two weeks, when she was trying to revise for her NEWTs, a popular new hobby seemed to be coming up to her, staring, and when she got annoyed, asking, “Did you say yes?”

Of course, that was one of the many cons about agreeing to marry Tom – the fact that the Quidditch game had been on radio, and that just about everyone in the Wizarding world had heard him propose. The other cons would form a list down to her feet if she wrote them down. Scott disappearing from ever being seen again. Bernard all horrified and not talking to her. Ginny would have never said that she would have missed him, but she did, in a weird way. They were sort

of friends; bonded by dislike. Philippa never shutting up about how romantic everything was... that alone was annoying as hell.

The fact that no-one had actually heard Ginny's answer made everyone extremely curious. It was the best thing the gossip-girls had found in months. Ginny Peregrine, possible murderer – her boyfriend is the actual murderer, and gets sent to prison – gets bailed out – breaks up with her – she nearly dies – boyfriend begs her to take him back, and then they get engaged.

Ginny had to admit, if it had been anyone else, even she would have been interested.

Claude gave her blessings... in a way. "Aw," she said one day when they met up in the library, "I think it's really cute, you know. Two killers getting married. I wish you all the best – but I do have an enquiry." She twined one corkscrew curl around her finger. "I'm curious. If you get someone who's half-mud, and someone who's completely mud, then what would your little murderer babies be? Three-quarters mud? Or would that just classify as general filth?"

Ginny hit her.

Bernard ignored her in the hallways. She put it down to jealousy – he liked her, and she was engaged now – but she wasn't quite so sure.

On her way back from Arithmancy, she saw him emerge from a painting of Henry, Son of Revill, with his schoolbag in hand.

"I'll be right back," Ginny said to Alden, who she took Arithmancy with, and hurried towards him. "Bernard!"

Despite him being a year younger, he was taller than her, and gave her a cold, aloof look from above. "Yeah?" he said, his voice unfriendly.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Me and you were never exactly best buddies, but you're just... acting like you hate me. You don't, do you?" She peered up at him, fearful for the answer. She didn't like

people hating her – apart from people like Claude and Professor Slughorn. She didn't really give a damn about them.

"I don' hate ya," Bernard said. "I hate what ya've done."

"Huh?" she blinked at him.

Bernard narrowed his light-green eyes. "I tell ya to be careful, and I tell ya not to get too involved with Riddle, and whaddaya do? Ya agree to marry him."

Ginny crossed her arms and scowled. "That's none of your business."

"It is if it gets ya killed."

"Will you shut up with all of this doom and gloom stuff?" she snapped. "No-one is going to try and kill me just because I accidentally got a glimpse of the future a while ago. And I don't care what you say about Tom and me, because – because I'm going to-" She screwed up her face. "-marry him-" She went bright red. "-and there's nothing that you can say or do that will stop me."

Bernard seemed to ignore everything that she'd said. He stared down at her, his eyes like emeralds. His expression softened slightly, before hardening again, and he said sharply, "This is a death-wish."

"Shut up!" Ginny snapped. "I talked to Alden about it, and his dad works in the Ministry, and he says that it's a load of bollocks that you're coming out with-"

"Mr. Philips'z a lawyer. What would he know?"

"You're a sixth-year!" Ginny shouted. "What would you know?"

"A lot!" Bernard was breathing heavily through his nose. "Just ditch Riddle, that s'all I ask of you. Ya'll have so much more. Ya can stay friends with Reeve. Ya can stay friends with me. Just ditch Riddle."

The mention of Scott tore at Ginny's heart. "Leave Scott out of this!" she snarled. "I'm starting to think, you know, that this is just another

one of your retarded plans to try and get me to go out with you! And that's just sad!"

"Don' be stupid," he retorted, but there something in the back of his eyes opposing his statement. "I wouldn' want ya anyway."

"Why?" she challenged. "Because I'm a Mudblood? Because I'm proud of being a Mudblood? Or just because I'm the only one who refuses to fall to your every wish, and you, as the typical stubborn boy, can't let it go?!"

"Fine." Bernard took a step backwards, held his hands up in the air, as if to signify taking his grip off something. "Watch me." His eyes narrowed. "I'm lettin' go." Without another word, he wheeled around and disappeared through the portrait of Henry, Son of Revill.

Ginny never saw him again.

xxx

The mock results came back. Ginny did very well, but a few subjects, such as Arithmancy, she wanted to do even better on, and she studied even harder. She owed Tom to ask him what he got on his NEWTs, but the answer came back that he'd received all Oustandings, which didn't make her feel much better.

The NEWTs began. She had no time for any of her friends as her life evaporated into a craze of writing and reading and studying and answering questions and visiting Career Advisors. She was so busy that she, for a while, forgot how ecstatically happy she was.

All of a sudden, it was all over.

At dinner, Professor Dippet announced that the NEWT results would be owed to each individual student at the end of the summer.

The final Quidditch game of the season was played, and was won by Ravenclaw, as in the last few seconds of the Ravenclaw-Slytherin game, they pulled ahead and caught the Snitch. Therefore

Ravenclaw won the Quidditch Cup, with Slytherin coming a sulky second-place.

Philippa and Alden broke up near the end of the year, as they'd hardly known each other when they got together, as they became better friends, they realised that they worked better as friends than anything else.

And, as Grace said, Philippa Philips sounded stupid.

The evening before the last day of term came, and every seventh-year gathered in the Great Hall. Alden had spent a long time organising the Graduation Ball, and it was as incredible as everyone had dreamed it would be. The theme was black, and everyone wore their dresses and tuxedos under their special graduation robes, floppy hats atop their heads.

Something had to go wrong with Ginny's graduation, of course. Her hat was much too big, and it fell over her eyes all the time. It was because of this that when she headed up to the podium to collect her certificate scroll that she couldn't see, and therefore tripped over the hem of her robes, crashing in a heap on the steps, simultaneously bringing down Professor Slughorn and Penelope Dann (the teachers and the Head Boy and Girl stood in a semi-circle around the podium).

"Sorry!" she gasped, jumping to her feet. Every blood cell surged to her face as she helped Dann and Slughorn up. "I'm really sorry, sir." She didn't bother apologising to Dann. That idiot wasn't worth it.

Slughorn gave her a haughty look as he straightened his robes, and Ginny continued up to Dippet amidst snickers, lifting her hat away from her eyes so that she could see.

Afterwards, the students shed their robes and twirled in graceful circles across the room.

The redhead had simply chosen to wear again the black dress that she'd had made for the Broken-Hearts Soiree.

Ginny had wanted to ask Scott to accompany her to the Graduation Ball... as friends, she said consciously to herself, because he's my friend. Unconsciously, she knew that it was because they both knew that it was his last chance to have any part of her. However, she hadn't been able to find him, and it was only now in the sparkling Great Hall that she could spy him in his dark tuxedo, standing by the bar.

"Can I have this dance?" she asked, skipping up to him.

"I applaud you on throwing yourself at Slughorn," Scott replied coolly, ignoring what she'd said. "I've always wanted to do that, but unfortunately he was too far from where I was standing."

"Why, thank you." Ginny swept into a low bow. "Now, I think that you've avoided my question." She lifted her eyebrows and extended her arms. "Dance with me?"

"No."

Ginny's face fell. "Please?"

"What's the point of dancing with me when you're going to marry Riddle?"

"What- it's only a dance as friends!"

"If you want to dance with someone as friends, then dance with Alden," Scott said sharply, "because I'm not your friend anymore."

Hurt filled Ginny's hazel eyes. "Scott!" She stared up at him, trying to understand what anger caused this rift between them.

"You know as well as I do that you can't be friends with someone you're in love with. You discovered that with Riddle. I discovered that with you. There comes a time when you have to decide." Scott tore his eyes away and stared darkly at the floor. "You made your decision before I even knew you were deciding."

“Ditch Riddle, that’s all I ask of ya. Ya’ll have so much more. Ya can stay friends with Reeve. Just ditch Riddle.”

He was right, no matter how much Ginny hated to admit it. They’d become close, but only because he wanted to be closer – and if he couldn’t be as close as possible, then he didn’t want to be anywhere near her.

Without another word, Ginny went, quite pointedly, to dance with Alden.

She danced with almost everyone. She danced with Grace, Philippa, Alden, Ramira, Antonia Durrell, Mia Brown, Jack Swithin, even, amazingly, Faisal Alfonso, other students who she barely even knew, and a couple of teachers.

Tears streamed down most people’s faces as Dippet called from the podium speakers that this was the last dance... the last song... the last evening... and the end of their school lives.

Grace paired up with Alden to dance, and Philippa, seeing Ginny’s dismay, asked Scott to dance. Ginny heard him say no, and saw Philippa whirl him out onto the dance-floor anyway. Ginny spun in circles by herself, but then Grace and Alden pulled her into their dancing, making a little swaying circle. Then Scott and Philippa linked on. Ramira and Michael Yates joined. Slowly, a huge circle of seventh-years grew out of nothingness, and even Jack Swithin, macho man, had a glimmer in his eyes of nostalgia as the song drew to a close.

xxx

The Hogwarts Express made its long journey across the Scottish Highlands... down the length of England to London...

“It’s hard to believe that we’re never going back!” Grace exclaimed.

“I know,” Alden said. “It feels weirdsville.”

“We’ll keep in touch, though,” Grace promised. “Right?”

“Right,” they all agreed.

“And so help me, I will unleash the wrath of Decrow if I’m not invited to your wedding,” Philippa said fiercely to Ginny.

She laughed in reply. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Underneath her, Ginny could feel the train slowing down, and she stood to get her trunk down. The other three followed suit, and they all squashed into the hallway with thousand of other students to get into King’s Cross.

“Are you sure that it’s okay for me to stay with you?” Ginny verified with her friend as Grace stumbled onto the platform. “Careful!”

Grace just missed falling through the gap between the train and the platform, and staggered onto solid ground. “Thanks,” she said. “Yeah, it’s fine, trust me. My parents loved you last summer.”

Ginny beamed. She said hello to the Hartwins, who recognised her hair immediately, and hugged everyone she knew goodbye, including Jack Swithin, who she’d become quite close to, and even a very reluctant Avani, who was now going out with Jack, much to her glee, and much to Claude’s distaste. Her smile only grew in size when she noticed past Avani’s shoulder that there was a tall, dark-haired young man leaning against the nine-and-three-quarters signpost.

“Be right back!” she said, dumping her trunk next to Grace’s, and then ran across the station. “Hi!”

“Hello,” said Tom, pushing off the signpost to greet her. He took her hands, smiling, but his eyes flickered sideways right and left.

“Everyone’s staring at us, aren’t they?” Ginny grinned.

“Yes.” Tom raised an eyebrow. “Perhaps the Quidditch-screen idea wasn’t as wonderful as I had originally thought,” he muttered, keeping his head low. “Either way...” He let go of her hands, and gave them a meaningful look.

“What?” Ginny frowned.

Tom rolled his eyes with exasperation before looking pointedly at her hands again and clearing his throat.

She followed his gaze, and noticed the small shiny ring that had suddenly appeared on her ring finger.

“Ooh!” she squealed. “I get it now!” She clapped her hands together like a small child, before throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him tightly. “Thank you thank you thank you!” Then she realised something, and removed her face from his shoulder to look up at him. “I haven’t got one for you,” she said in horror.

“That is to be expected, considering you’ve only just stepped off the school train,” Tom said coolly.

“Oh, yeah, well, I guess so.” She grinned at him. “You wait, though!”

“Giiiiinnnyyyy...” came a long, drawn-out shout from behind her.

“I think that’s my hotel calling,” said Ginny, tilting her head to one side. “I’ll see you soon.” She stretched up further to kiss him on the cheek. “Love you.”

“It goes without saying that I love you.”

“But you decided to say it anyway.”

He gave her a withering smirk that said ‘very funny’. He quickly touched his lips to her forehead, then spun her shoulders around so that she faced Grace and her family, before pushing her gently towards them.

A huge grin split Ginny’s face as she hurried back to the Hartwins, and to Grace’s confused expression, she merely held up her left hand to show the world the glittering band on her finger.

As Grace shrieked and babbled on about trivial things while they headed towards the Apparation zone, Ginny couldn't help but think, glancing back to the sign-post where a certain dark-haired fiancé of hers was watching her departure, that a happy ending seemed a possibility after all.

THE END

xxx

A/N: Well, there we go. The end of Press Play. I'll be finishing Backtrack before I start posting up Fast-Forward, however, so hold on for that. Thank you massively to:

Everyone who reviewed: honestly, you've been the people who keep this fic alive, I love you all so much. Thanks more than anyone else.

J.K. Rowling: Goes without saying. You've created the two most incredible characters in the fictional world, and I love messing them around. :D

Stephanie Meyer: Parallel ideas. She had to be on here.

TheRainbowFish/Ocey: My best friend. My biggest fan. The editor of the most important parts of this fic – the Azkaban part, the breaking-up part. Eight days of cycling around a labyrinth campsite, counting attractive French guys, sitting in the dark on a beach and telling the saga of my story. I adore you to no end and don't know what I'd do without you, though we haven't spoken in a while since then.

storm-brain: for being the wonderful producer of the movie trailer for Rewind, I think being posted on Youtube as we speak. Thank you so much.

Heroes: for giving me the parasite idea.

Paramore, Coldplay, Rascal Flatts, Taylor Swift, Boys Like Girls, The Cab, The Maine, Taking Back Sunday, The Click Five, Avenged Sevenfold, a-Ha, Breaking Benjamin, The Scene Aesthetic: for providing a sequel's worth of inspiration. I love you.

Tom Riddle, Ginny Weasley: for agreeing to let me manipulate them, mwahaha.

Mysterious sixth-former who looks uncannily like Tom Riddle: thanks! You give me ideas, even if I've never even spoken to you. Or if I don't even know your name. Even if you have a girlfriend.

Thank you all times infinity to the end of time. May a supernova explode over your heads at the edge of the galaxy.

...I like astronomy, okay? –scowl-